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## O. INTRO:

There is a song in the great musical about grace and law...Les Mis entitled "I dreamed a dream."

It moves me every time I listen to it because I think of real lives living in shattered dreams

I dreamed a dream in times gone by  
When hope was high and life worth living  
I dreamed, that love would never die  
**I dreamed that God would be forgiving**  
Then I was young and unafraid  
And dreams were made and used and wasted  
**There was no ransom to be paid**

So different from this hell I'm living  
So different now from what it seemed  
**Now life has killed the dream I dreamed**

Life has demonstrated to many, it seems to them...that God is not forgiving and he demands that they must pay their own ransom.

**Today we are continuing in Heb 11.**

**During this winter season we want to close the gap on faith, confidence in God.**

**Heb. 11:4 By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.  
5 By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.  
6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.**

**There are three faith stories here, let's look at each of them.**

### I. Cain and Abel

#### **The story:**

- Eve became pregnant and gave birth to two sons.
- Cain became a farmer
- Abel a shepherd

**Gen. 4:3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. 4 But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his**

face was downcast. 6 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

God offered a warning to Cain...but he did not heed it.

Instead he lured his brother into a field and murdered him.

Why did God reject Cain's offering and accept his brother's?

The story tells the answer...Cain's heart was a mess...so his offering was a sham.

When God, in his grace, brought conviction...Cain responded with hardness.

It was not his offering...God didn't prefer meat over grain...it was his heart.

Offerings in the Bible are meant to be external representations of internal heart orientations.

In Isaiah God said...

**1:11 "The multitude of your sacrifices — what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.**

He said their offerings were meaningless because their lives were void of character...the content of their lives defiled the content of their sacrifices.

They brought sacrifices but did not seek justice for the oppressed, they did not take up the cause of the fatherless and the widows.

There was no ethical content in their character...so there was no worship content in their sacrifices.

**Consider a spouse who is unloving, selfish...then in order to get something out of the other spouse...brings a gift..."Here is my offering."**

Who would desire such a thing?

However if a spouse has been selfish and then truly becomes sorry...begins to act differently...and then as a sign of internal change that is showing up in external choices...offers a gift.

It is a very different thing.

Or better yet if a spouse truly loves the other and simply to show in an external way, their internal devotion...offers a gift...not to persuade or manipulate but just from the overflow of the heart...again, a very different thing.

The problem with Cain's offering, like those of Israel's later on was the absence of a faith relationship.

Faith as confidence, relationship with God...that shows up in life content...character, love for others, acts of obedience.

How could Cain's heart be full of faith and at the same time filled with self and rage?

So Abel still "speaks" though he is dead...his offering was accepted, because of the orientation of his heart.

But in fact, they both speak, though they are both dead.

One speaks a vision, the other a dark warning.

Cain outlived Abel...but both are dead and Cain's life did not count like Abel's did.

Abel's was shorter than Cain's but both have been dead for centuries...what difference does a few years make now?

Abel's short life speaks of faith.

Cain's longer, but still short life speaks of selfishness and faithlessness.

**Jim Elliott was born in 1927, died in 1956 at the age 28...he gave his life for the gospel in Ecuador.**

He famously said "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

How many men born in 1927 along with Jim do you suppose are now still alive...statistically about 14 out of 1000 of them.

And those few, all will be dead in the next few years.

No one saves their life...but we **can** choose to spend our lives on what ultimately matters.

Abel speaks to us of a life lived for God...faith expressed in a simple sacrifice...but behind the sacrifice was a heart that was turned toward God.

Both are dead, but the story of Cain's life is waste; the story of Abel's (shorter life) is God's glory.

Let's go on to the next story.

## **II. Enoch**

**Heb. 11:5 By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.**

Here's the OT account

**Gen. 5:23 Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. 24 Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.**

Now that is a short and strange story.

It is noteworthy, of course, that Enoch did not die...but the reason his story is highlighted is why he did not die.

"He walked with God"

Enoch did not suffer the fate of Adam, because unlike Adam "he walked with God" rather than walking away from God.

For the author of Genesis, "walking with God" is the way to life.

As Moses says to the people in the wilderness, **"See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands ... and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess"** (Deut 30:15-16).

Walking with God is not merely keeping a set of laws...it is relational.

When you say "I'm going for a walk with someone" it implies relationship.

It also implies a path...we walk with God and we walk in God's ways.

We often use this phrase to describe a life oriented around God.

We might ask "How is your walk with God"

But we don't ask "How is your obedience to the law going?"

To walk with God is to obey...but we obey because we want to keep in step with God.

We want to walk in his will and ways so that we can walk with him in his life and light.

So we don't know much about Enoch, but we know enough. He walked with God.

Clearly most people are not going to escape physical death like Enoch did.

He was an anomaly in that fact...but he is not supposed to be an anomaly in why he escaped the curse of death.

And what his life "says" to us is that we reverse the curse by walking with God.

**So we know three things about Enoch:**

1. He walked with God
2. He escaped the dying process
3. God commended him...he received a "well done" from God.

We don't know any other of his actions or attributes...but we know enough to get the point.

To walk with God means to "walk by faith"

It is a walk, not a "sit"...in this life it is a progressive movement of relationship.

Our walk with God is a life of continually closing the gap in faith in God.

There is no question Enoch did not live a faultless life...no one in Scripture did apart from Jesus.

So his walk with God was not perfect, but evidently it was authentic.

On to the third, and final story for today.

**III. Without faith**

**"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."**

Okay, whose story is this?

"Anyone's"

It is your story and mine.

**Let's unpack the story.**

1. Not all things are possible for God
2. If we are going experience him we must first believe he exists.
3. Then we must believe he actually responds to those who seek him.

**1. Not all things are possible for God.**

In Luke 1, the Angel told Mary she would be with child even though she had not slept with a man.

In addition, the angel said even barren Elizabeth is going to have a child.

Because, the angel said, "All things are possible with God."

What this means is that God can do anything that can be done.

He can cause a fetus to grow in a womb without human conception...there is no contradiction in this.

He can unlock a barren womb, again no problem for God.

He can also make a universe, cause a man to leave this life without dying.

However, he cannot do what is self-contradictory...a self-contradiction is not a thing to be done, it is merely words in sentence.

"Can God make a rock so big he cannot pick it up?"

That is not a thing that can be done, that is merely clever but self-contradictory words in a sentence.

There are other self-contradictory things that cannot be done.

He cannot, not be God.

**So** he cannot, not be good or powerful and he cannot cease to exist.

And cannot be pleased apart from faith...why?

**Romans 14:23 says that "anything that does not come from faith is sin."**

Faith is confidence in and compliance with God.

To **not** live by confidence in God is to live by faith in someone or something else.

This is also known as "idolatry"

Idolatry is so destructive because we become like that which we worship and wrap our hearts around.

How could God be God and at the same time be pleased with anything other than confidence (faith) in him?

How could he be pleased with idolatry?

So without faith it is impossible to please God.

But not faith as in "I think he can, I think he can, I hope he can!"

But faith as in "You are God, here is my life...yes.

## **2. If we are going experience him we must first believe he exists.**

Clearly believing someone exists is a prerequisite for relationship with them.

If this is a struggle for you, I do not take this lightly, neither, I think, does God.

This is an area where you could look to close the gap if need be.

"Those who come to him must believe he exists."

Do you struggle to believe that he exists?

This is not some arbitrary condition or rule that could be one way or another.

"You must drive on the right side of the road"

"You must drive on the left side of the road."

"You must believe he exists."

This is like gravity, or air...you must not jump off a tall building, and you must breath air not water.

It is simply a fact that if you do not believe God actually exists...it is unlikely you will come to him in a way that leads to actual relationship with him.

It is unlikely you will trust him with important and ultimate things.

It is especially unlikely you will trust him with things become very difficult and confusing...or if something you really want that is contrary to him comes into your view.

## **You can close the gap on confidence in the reality of God if you will.**

You can talk with those who have long relationship with him and find out why they believe.

You can read stories that build faith.

## **You can "test" him in your life.**

By test him, I don't mean...

"God, show me you are there...give me a raise on Friday" or "Have someone wash my car without asking."  
or "Take away this physical pain"

This is not a game and he is God after all.

By test him, I don't mean "Put to a test"

Satan is the one who tempted Jesus to "test" his Father with silly "magic tricks".

"Jump off this high wall and watch God catch you!"

"Turn this rock into food!"

By test, I mean...put his will into action in your life and see that it works.

This will take some time and it will involve sacrifice.

It will take faithfulness and faith.

Yes in the little things...YES in the big risks he will call you too.

The real proof of the reality of his word is how it changes us into people who increasingly become different from the inside out.

Our lives, our relationships match what is real and good.

Listen to this passage but from the perspective of seeing God prove himself real in what happens in our lives.

**Gal. 5:16 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature...The acts of the sinful nature are obvious (He lists destructive choices and traits)  
...22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control.**

We don't memorize this list and try our best to be loving, joyful, peaceful, patient...etc.

We walk with God in obedience...we believe he exists and that he rewards those who seek him...and as we do...we become like him.

We change...inside and out.

The "fruit of the Spirit"...singular not plural...grows from a life full of the Holy Spirit.

Again...this "experiential change" will take time and some "risk"

You have to step out and walk with God...where he will take you will often be uncomfortable.

You will have to plant seeds of faith...obedience...and not keep digging them up to see if they are growing.

You will need to endure when it seems like change is not coming...but...

**Gal. 6:9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.**

This perseverance is the third part of our faith story.

**"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."**

**3. Then we must believe he actually responds to (rewards) those who walk with him.**

Many have been disillusioned by unanswered prayers.

They have sought God most earnestly to obtain from him something they greatly desire.

Health, job, relief from anxiety, a relationship...and yet they have not obtained what they sought.

So they try harder to believe, confess sin, go to conferences...work up their faith "feelings" so that they might be even more earnest.

Still...no reward, no relief.

Its no wonder many do not trust God...this doesn't work...they say.

But is the problem with God? Has he failed to keep his promise?

Has he promised that if we earnestly seek him, he will do whatever we ask?

Let's reword this sentence..."If we seek God we will be rewarded by finding God"

God told Jeremiah, "When you seek me with all your heart, you will find me."

And he told Abraham, "I am your very great reward."

Do you see the real problem?

Our desires are often way off...we want something God can give us...and we are disappointed when he **only** offers us relationship with himself.

This brings to light an important fact about faith.

It is impossible to please God without it, because it is impossible to be **pleased** with God without it.

When we see through the eyes of faith...what is real, what is valuable, what is permanent...then he becomes more and more the prime object of our seeking.

Of course we want things...some desperately.

These things we want are not always bad, or selfish...and we should ask, seek, knock.

When we are learning to find our greatest satisfaction in him, we are positioned to find contentment and even joy in what he brings into our lives.

When we find our ultimate meaning in him, we tend to find the other aspects of our lives, whatever they are, increasingly meaningful as well.

**Faith pleases God partly because faith makes us pleased *with* God.**

### **CONCLUSION:**

So, is the application to feel bad about our lack of desire for God?

I think a barrier to confidence in God can be too much confidence in self.

But another barrier, perhaps even more common, at least in some lives...is a belief that they are so sinful, so wretched...that God could not possibly love and accept them.

**It can be difficult...either because of self-perceptions or terrible life circumstances to believe that God is forgiving, that the ransom has been paid for your life.**

That he knows you and still wants you...you are not repugnant to him.

Perhaps your hesitancy to move out and trust God is due to the belief that you are beyond help, unable to change in substantial ways.

**-Belief:** Do you believe God wants you and that he can change you?

**-Expectancy:** Do you believe that you can move towards God in this way?

That there is nothing outside your control that could stop you?

No personality trait, no past experience, no current barrier....God could, he won't...he is all for it.

**-Desire:** Will you take the steps of faith in front of you today that demonstrate confidence in God?

There are too many possibilities here to even get started.

But in principle you will grow in confidence in God as you do the next small thing he has in front of.

Maybe the next small thing...seems huge to you.

Maybe the next step for you in closing the gap in faith in God is to just believe that God actually wants relationship with you.

Maybe you are disgusted with yourself, so it is hard for you to believe he is not.

Like the lyrics to the song...that I think accurately portray many lives:

"I dreamed that God would be forgiving...now life has killed that dream."

Will you take him at his word and move towards him?

He told the people of Israel he was disgusted with their offerings because their lives were such a mess...but he didn't then say...**so get out of my sight.**

He told them this.

**Is. 1:18 "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.**

He says this same thing to you and to me still.

Close the gap, move towards him.