

Text: Hebrews 11:1

Theme: Just the Facts, Please

August 7, 2016

Years ago, I recall watching episodes of Dragnet with Sergeant Joe Friday whose classic line at any crime scene was always the same, "Just the facts, please. Just the facts." Skip the fluff because Sergeant Friday wanted nothing but the facts. Sergeant Friday would have appreciated today's text because it's short, concise, and nothing but the facts as faith is defined in a single sentence. However, for the benefit of the rest of us, that single line is followed by numerous lines of evidence, evidence to support the facts about faith.

I. Based on our text, faith is assurance and conviction. A. Faith is the conviction of things not seen. 1. Our faith is built on the irrefutable. How many of you like a good debate, like to get someone else's dander up with a heated conversation? In the minds of some, debates are entertainment, but in the arena of faith, there's ultimately no debate. Faith is faith and you can't change it. You can argue it, attempt to poke holes in it, but, at the end of the day, faith will be what faith has always been. Faith derives from God and what derives from God will never be altered by debate. Luther said it as well as anyone, "Here I stand; I can do no other, so help me God!"

2. Our faith is built on absolutes. How many absolutes can you find in our world? Within our world, nothing is stable; everything is changing; everything, according to the misinformed, is changing for the better, and we are in control of our surroundings. But who are we trying to fool? There is only one absolute, One who does not change; One who offers what does not and cannot change. Our absolute God is the author and finisher of our absolute faith. You can change the definition in your mind or allow someone else to redefine faith, but all they are doing is redefining the term, not faith itself. Faith is what faith is and nothing will ever change that fact.

3. Faith is built on unwavering trust. Faith is the conviction, but our faith-house is built on unwavering trust. Look at Noah. Noah was asked to build an ark in preparation for a flood although he was situated in the middle of a desert. If you or I were Noah, we know how the conversation would have gone. But it didn't go that way for Noah because of his unwavering trust. It didn't have to make sense or appear logical. Nothing had to be reasonable in Noah's mind as long as his trust did not waver. Today, God calls us to that same unwavering trust, to lean on Him, rely on Him, follow Him even when everything around us appears to call us in another direction.

4. Faith built on conviction also expects absolute obedience. Abraham was called to leave his home for a new home out there somewhere. Coupled with that dangerous, unnerving request, God says, "Abraham, take your only son and sacrifice him." Would you have left home on either journey? Absolute obedience leads us to go when we are called to go, to obey when we don't want to obey, to listen to the small whisper of God's voice when the booming voice of common sense and logic are ringing in our ears. Those great men and women of faith, their obedience was unbending, immovable. They would not budge. That's conviction in action.

B. As we look at the facts, we're also told that faith is the assurance of things hoped for. 1. As we look at the facts, faith is built on confidence. We throw the word around so frequently that it has nearly lost its meaning. "I'm confident we will win. I'm confident it will rain. I'm confident I will get that promotion." Really? Is that all there is to confidence today? Sarah who was far beyond childbearing age, who had never had a child was told she would have a son. She believed that God would deliver. Now, that's confidence; unwavering trust, the assurance that God would come through. That's the confidence we cling to amid all the chaos that surrounds us.

2. Faith is built on a tangible hope. "I hope it doesn't rain this weekend. I hope I get a new bike for my birthday. I hope it's not too hot at the lake." Sound familiar? With years of practice, we've turned hope into a wet noodle, into something so unless that it slips through our fingers like corn starch mixed with water. These great men and women of faith had a tangible hope. It was coming. It was going to happen. They could taste it, smell it, sense it. They may have greeted it from afar, but it was just beyond their fingertips and they knew it. How tangible is your hope? How near is that reality in your mind? It's going to happen soon. Are you ready?

3. Faith is built on the guarantee. "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life." Hum... Does that sound like a maybe, a possibility, a "if I do enough of the right things" kind of statement? If faith offers it, it arrives with a guarantee. No ands, ifs, or buts. God said it and I believe it and that settles it. Can you say it any better? You can't lose. It can't accidentally slip out of your hands. It can't slip through the cracks. Faith is and faith is guaranteed to be everything God has promised. Claim it; hold it tight, refuse to let go, and every guarantee attached will become yours. It doesn't get any better than that.

4. Faith contains unlimited power. What's the most powerful object you can think of? Who is the strongest person you know? Now, let's make a simple comparison. Hebrews says, "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God." God spoke and it was. Anyone or anything you know of compare to that kind of power? What about the words of Jesus, "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'throw yourself into the sea' and it will be done." Any question about the unlimited power of the faith that lives in your heart, the faith that God can use to accomplish unimaginable things through you?

5. Faith facts are unchangeable. Change. We live in it; we're surrounded by it. Some love it, thrive on it, and can't wait for more. But faith facts are in a category all their own. You may live for change and everything else may change, but faith will not budge, not a yard, not a foot, not an inch. If you want security in the midst of change, stand on your faith. If you want something secure when everything else is in motion, faith is it. What was 2,000 years ago or three or four or seven thousand years ago, still is exactly the same today. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever and so is the faith He imparts into the hearts of mere humans like us.

6. Sergeant Joe Friday may have been a just the facts kind of guy, but in the arena of faith, we are and can be no different - Just the facts, please. Just the faith facts. Amen.