

“Journeys and Destinations – Seeing Faith”
Pastor Wally Contreras
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“Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up and began walking. And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.” (Acts 14:8-18)

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Pastor Wally’s message is entitled “Seeing Faith”...but Hebrews 11:1 tells me that “...faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (emphasis added), so can I “see” faith or not and why?

So, Paul “intently” looks at the crippled man. Webster’s 1828 Dictionary defines “intently” to mean “[w]ith close attention or application; with eagerness or earnestness.” The fact that the man was a cripple does not require close observation...Ray Charles could see that the man was a cripple. What do I believe was it about this cripple that required Paul’s “close attention”?

1 Samuel 16:7 reminds me that “...the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” What is needed for me to be able to “not look on [someone’s] appearance or on the height of [their] stature” and to see what truly weighs on their heart? Explain.

Paul saw that the cripple “had faith to be made well”...to be saved. Pastor Wally spoke of Paul having discernment between what is “true” faith and “vain” faith – vain meaning “empty; worthless; having no substance, value or importance” (Webster’s 1828 Dictionary). In what or in whom does the world around me place its faith and why?

So, what is faith? Charles Spurgeon, preaching on Hebrews 11:6a (“And without faith it is impossible to please him”), gave three tests for “true faith”:

“He that has faith has renounced his own righteousness. If you put one atom of trust in yourself you have no faith. If you place even a particle of reliance upon anything else but what Christ did, you have no faith. If you trust in your works, then your works are anti-Christ and Christ and anti-Christ can never go together. Christ will have all or nothing. He must be a whole Savior, or none at all.” Spurgeon asserts that faith is an all-or-nothing proposition...just like it’s impossible to be a “little pregnant” it’s equally impossible to have a “little faith.” How about me? What kind of faith does my life reflect? Explain.

Spurgeon continued: “Then true faith may be known by this—it begets a great esteem for the Person of Christ. Do you love Christ? Could you die for Him? Do you seek to serve Him? Do you love His people?...Oh, if you do not love Christ you do not believe in Him for to believe in Christ begets love.” Seeking involves going “in search or quest of; to look for; to search for by going from place to place.” (Webster’s 1828 Dictionary) Do I truly “seek to serve Him” or am I waiting for God to point out where He wants me to serve and because He hasn’t, I don’t?

Are there those of God’s people that I don’t love but rather tolerate or ignore? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Lastly Spurgeon said regarding faith that “...he that has true faith will have true obedience. If a man says he has faith and has no works, he lies. If any man declares that he believes in Christ and yet does not lead a holy life, he lies. While we do not trust in good works, we know that faith always begets good works. Faith is the father of holiness and he has not the parent who loves not the child. God’s blessings are blessings with both His hands. In the one hand He gives pardon. But in the other hand He always gives holiness. And no man can have the one unless he has the other.” Does the world around me see my life as being holy...set apart for God...or not? Explain.

What does having “true obedience” involve and why?

What are some things in my life that I need to change regarding obedience to Him so that my life will stand in starker contrast to life as the world desires it to be?

When Paul and Barnabas discovered that the crowd had declared that they were gods and the priests were about to offer a sacrifice to them, they “tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, “Men, why are you doing these things?” (Acts 14:14-15a) According to gotquestions.org, tearing their garments was an ancient tradition that was first mentioned in Genesis. “When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes” (Genesis 37:29). It reflected “mourning, grief, and loss” as well as “to express pain and sorrow” as in the case of Paul and Barnabas. “It is interesting that the high priest was not allowed to tear his clothes: ‘The high priest, the one among his brothers who has had the anointing oil poured on his head and who has been ordained to wear the priestly garments, must not . . . tear his clothes’ (Leviticus 21:10)”, but we see in Matthew 26:65 that “...the high priest tore his robes and said, “He (Jesus) has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy.” “Blasphemy is an injury offered to God, by denying that which is due and belonging to him, or attributing to him that which is not agreeable to his nature. (Webster’s 1828 Dictionary)” The people of Lystra were “denying that which is due and belonging to Him” so Paul and Barnabas tore their garments. How do I react when someone denies “that which is due and belonging to Him”? Do I react when someone denies “that which is due and belonging to Him” and why?

Joel 2:13 tells me to “...rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.” Paul told the folks to “turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.” Are there some “vain things” (“empty; worthless; having no substance, value or importance” (Webster’s 1828 Dictionary) in my life that I need to repent of (to “turn from”) in order that I can more fully “return to the Lord [my] God” who is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster”?

Is this a message that I need to share with my “Who’s Your One”? If so, how can I do that? If not, why not?

Pastor Wally’s Exhortations was based on Philippians 1:9-11 (“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”) and said that we need to pray that the Holy Spirit will “fill us with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ”...that we need to be a “fruit producing people.” What are some of the outward signs of a “fruit producing people” and what outward signs, if any, are we seeing in our church?

Lastly, Pastor Wally said that we need to pray that “we bring glory and praise to God through all we do” (emphasis added). So, what do I call the things that I do that do not bring glory and praise to God?