

## **THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF YOUR FAITH**

**Today's Text: Romans 5: 1 - 5**

### **Extracts:**

**Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us [Rom. 5: 1-5]**

*Wilma Rudolph (1940-94) was the 20<sup>th</sup> of 22 children born to poor African-American parents in Bethlehem, Tennessee, USA.<sup>1</sup>In childhood, she was paralysed by polio compounded by scarlet fever and double pneumonia. She spent her childhood in leg braces and special shoes. So, many doctors and family members never gave her any chance to walk normally again. She believed otherwise. At 12, she recovered and took up athletics. In 1956 (at age 16), she represented the US at the Melbourne Games and won a bronze medal as a member of the 4 x 100 metres relay team. Four years later, at the Rome Olympic Games, she won gold in the 100m, 200m and 4 x 100m relay, breaking three world records in the process. She returned home to a hero's welcome, including a visit to President John Kennedy in the White House. After retiring from athletics in 1962, she travelled with Evangelist Billy Graham to West Africa and with the Baptist Christian Athletes to Japan. Summarising her life experience, she said in her biography, "You can't go back to living the way you did before because you've been taken out of one setting and shown the other. That becomes a struggle and makes you struggle."*

*That is a good summary of the believer's life; it is a struggle. We were born crippled by sin. Then, by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, we have been delivered to do great things for ourselves and our God. But is that all there is to faith? No. Actually, the struggle begins after our profession of faith. So, how can we triumph over the struggles that follow? In this week's Bible verses, Paul takes us through the building blocks of faith that we can also use to triumph in our faith walk. This week's study is meant for ALL of us because we are ALL struggling to remain faithful to God's call.*

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<sup>1</sup> Story based on: "Wilma Rudolph biography," [http://www.browsebiography.com/bio-wilma\\_rudolph.html](http://www.browsebiography.com/bio-wilma_rudolph.html) and "Rome 1960: Wilma Rudolph Stormed To Gold," (8/25/1960), <http://www.olympic.org/wilma-rudolph>

## 1. Background: Faith-from profession to perfection

Believers, that is, those of us who are required to walk by faith and not by sight, face a major difficulty concerning our faith. We cannot boast of it before God because it has little to do with our own effort. When we try to impress human beings with it, we soon sound hypocritical. So, *we suffer in silence from what can be called a CDS disease- Credibility Deficiency Syndrome!* The going is getting harder as we approach end-times. Wickedness is getting worse as law is being used in supposedly enlightened quarters to punish or silence those who want to remain faithful to God or preach against sin. Some believers are succumbing to the beguiling message that if you cannot beat them, you should join them. The truth is that everybody is not doing it!<sup>2</sup> So, *today's message is for believers struggling to remain faithful to their calling.*

On one occasion, Jesus spoke to His disciples about offending and forgiving. He commanded them that if their brother sins against them seven times in a day and repents and asks for forgiveness on each occasion, they should forgive him. To His disciples, that was too hard. So they said to Him, "Increase our faith." Jesus responded that if they had faith the size of a mustard seed, they could command a mulberry tree to be pulled from its roots and be planted in the sea and it would obey them [Lk 17: 4-6]. What the Lord was teaching His disciples there is that *the size of your faith is measured by its use!*

To prove that point, let us look at how Jesus judged the faith of some people that He came across during His earthly ministry. When His disciples feared during a storm at sea while He slept, He called them people with *no faith* [Mk 4: 40]. At the Sermon on the Mount, He taught His listeners that those who worry about the basic necessities of life have *little faith* [Matt. 6: 30]. But look at those he called people of *great faith*: the Centurion who asked for healing for his servant by the mere spoken word of the Lord without needing to come to his house [Matt. 8: 10], and the Gentile woman who refused to go away until Jesus had spoken a word of healing for her severely demon-possessed daughter back home [Matt. 15: 21-28]. Interestingly, the two people with great faith were Gentiles while those with no faith were disciples of Jesus! Therefore, *your faith has little or nothing to do with for how long you have been a Christian or what rank you hold in your congregation. It depends on how well you use it; and how well you use it depends on how resilient it is.* That suggests a struggle to remain afloat.

That is where Paul's Epistle to the Romans becomes quite handy. *The faith that ultimately triumphs must first pass through fire* which has the following building blocks:

- a) *Thank God you had the faith to accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour!*

<sup>2</sup> "Everybody is not doing it" *Weekly Bible Study Series*, Vol. 2 No. 20: 29 July 2001; [http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume\\_2/PDFs/Everybodyisnotdoingit.pdf](http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume_2/PDFs/Everybodyisnotdoingit.pdf)

Paul writes, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have *peace* with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and *rejoice in hope* of the glory of God” [Rom. 5: 1-2].

Recall the day that you gave your life to Christ. It could have been at your water baptism or soon after. You were excited, so was everybody around you. Good music, a good and joyous congregation. Can you remember the story of Zacchaeus, the rich tax collector of short stature who climbed up a sycamore tree to be able to see Jesus passing by? When Jesus looked up and told him to come down because He was going to stay in his house that night, we are told “he made haste and came down, and received Him *joyfully*” [Lk 19: 1-6]. Recall also that, after the Philippian jailer had brought Paul and Silas out of jail and heard of the word of the Lord that they had spoken to him, he and his household believed and were immediately baptized. What did he do next? We are told, “When he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he *rejoiced*, having believed in God with all his household” [Acts 16: 25-34].

Therefore, to have Christ in your life is a firm promise of peace and joy. But the journey has just started! If you are going to rejoice in the hope of God’s glory, as Paul has told us, *hope is in the future, not in the present*. You must first move from here to there!

b) *Here comes the hard part!*

Paul adds that we must not only glory in hope but we must also glory in *tribulations* [Rom. 5: 3]. Tribulations conjure hardship, distress, ordeals, etc, none of which is pleasant. There will be trials and struggles- even worse than you could have imagined. For example, your decision to give your life to Christ is a challenge to your status quo. If you must become a new person, as your new life demands, your old ways must give way to the new man in Christ. Old habits must go; all things must become new [2 Cor. 5: 17]. But are you psychologically ready for that radical change? *The “bad” people you are breaking away from may not give you up without a fight and the “good” people you want to join may not yet trust you.* Here then comes the hard part of your conversion: persecution, no matter how subtle. For example, how many mothers in your congregation would allow a newly born-again ex-pedophile<sup>3</sup> to look after their young children without close police supervision? Indeed, all those who desire to live godly in Christ will suffer persecution [2 Tim. 3: 12]. It is much worse for new converts.

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<sup>3</sup>An adult who has sexual desire for children or who has committed the crime of sex with a child-*Encarta Dictionary- North America*

You will recall that soon after Paul's conversion, the Jews in Damascus plotted to kill him. They watched the gates of the city day and night so as to get him. So the disciples "took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket." When he arrived in Jerusalem and "tried to join the disciples... they were all afraid of him and did not believe that he was a disciple" [Acts 9: 23-26].

***Tribulations can also come from the contradictions between the old life that you are trying to give up and the new life you are trying to embrace.***

For example, what are you going to do with that person you are living with who is really not your legal spouse? What of the stolen wealth that has given you a false sense of security over the years? How will you deal with your former cult or gang members who are threatening to kill you if you ever squeal on them to the public or law enforcement agencies? Can you really surrender your total self to Christ's total control? It is a real struggle! If you can pass that test, the next one is even harder!

c) *But you must persevere*

Paul says, "We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance" [Rom. 5: 3]. To persevere is to remain steadfast and hang in there, no matter the odds or for how long. ***There will be setbacks. There will be difficulties and defeats but you must NEVER give up.*** The word of God says, "A righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity" [Prov. 24: 16].

***God does not wear a wrist watch because eternity cannot be timed. Therefore, He cannot be late when He makes you a promise.*** You cannot hurry Him up either because He will not grant your request until it is in your best interest for His purpose. So, why are you in such a hurry? ***Therefore, as you wait for Him, wait on Him with worship, praise and thanks.*** On the day it happens, you could be surprised. For example, when Peter was locked up by Herod who had planned to kill him a few days later, Peter fell asleep in his cell! That night, an angel of God came into the prison and set him free. Meanwhile, believers were gathered in the home of Mary, John Mark's mother, praying for his release. But when he came that night knocking on the door of her house, the people did not believe Rhoda's story (the little girl that had answered the knock on the door); claiming that it was not Peter at the door but his angel [Acts 12: 1-15]! Indeed, many may be the afflictions of the righteous but the Lord will deliver him out of them all [Ps. 34: 19]. Hang in there if you want to win!

d) *And then become a soldier of Christ*

Finally, Paul writes, "And perseverance [produces] character and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God

has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” [Rom. 5: 4-5]. *You have been roughed up by tribulations but toughened by perseverance. Now, your character has emerged as a true soldier of Christ who has endured and overcome hardship* and no longer “entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please [Him] who enlisted him as a soldier” [2 Tim. 2: 3-4]. Now armed with the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth, the shield of faith on your left hand and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God on your right, your feet are set to spread the gospel of peace and you can now withstand the wiles of the devil and his agents, physical and spiritual [Eph. 6:10-18]. There is no protection for your back because Jesus is behind you. But if you fear and turn to run, Satan can easily pierce you at the back! So, walk on and fear not- no matter how hard is the going.

That is the faith that endures but the struggle does not end until death! That is the faith that you and I should strive for. Are you ready for it?

## 2. Can you now build on your profession of faith?

With those building blocks in mind, you can now rework and reawaken your own faith. You can do so by answering the following questions *as truthfully as possible*:

a) *Where are you now?*

*Until you face a faith test, you cannot know where you are on faith.* For example, as a fisherman, Peter certainly knew how to swim. For example, when John told him that the resurrected Christ was by the sea shore when he went back to fishing, we are told, “Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment... and plunged into the sea” [Jn 22: 7]. He did not drown. Yet, when Jesus asked him a few years earlier to walk on water, he began to sink and cried out to the Lord for help! Fear cramped his swimming skills.

How would you act if you had no fat bank account or a steady job? What if somebody else were not picking your bills as your parents’ dependant or as a top official in government or industry? Could you really forego everything for Christ’s sake? Until you reach that kind of threshold, you really cannot as yet tell where you are on faith. As Jesus asked His disciples when they were shaken by a storm at sea, “Where is your faith?” [Lk 8: 25]. Do you know where yours is right now?

b) *What constitute(s) your obstacle(s) to growth in your faith?*

Recognize as early as possible what may constitute an obstacle to your faith growth. For example, until the rich young man came to Jesus to

know what he needed to do to gain eternal life, he was sure that he was already doing more than enough. He obeyed all the commandments. But when Jesus asked him to sell all he had and give to the poor and follow Him, he went away sad because he had great possessions [**Matt. 19: 16-22**]. Idolatry was his obstacle. *Anything that you place above God or that you refuse to give up is an idol.* So, search your heart very sincerely. *It could be the love of the world, manifesting as the lust of the flesh or the lust of the eyes or the pride of life* [**1 Jn 2: 15-16**]. Such things can infect your worship, such that you play the hypocrite instead of seeking the face of the Lord in spirit and in truth.

Do you accept only messages of prosperity or blessings but despise words of obedience, sacrifice and service? Can you endure pain and persecution or do you succumb to sin and error to avoid them? Can you resist temptation and suffer for the truth? Until you can bear all for Christ's sake, your faith is still small!

c) *Go for the real thing!*

**True faith is measured by action.** People will see it in you and know that you are a true follower of Christ. For example, when Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin, we are told, "When they [Council members] saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marvelled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus" [**Acts 4: 13**]. Their faith was real and it showed in their words and deeds.

You too can do it!

### 3. Conclusion: Keep the faith!

People will recognize you as a true person of faith, not by the size of the cross around your neck, the size of your congregation or how much speaking in tongues you do during worship but by your spiritual fruit manifesting as *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control* [**Gal. 5: 22-23**]. They will see that those qualities of faith abound in you and that you are neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ [**2 Pet. 1: 8**]. When you endure and keep growing in perseverance, your faith will carry you all through this turbulent world to the very end of your earthly sojourn. So by the time you are ready to go home to the Lord, you will be able to say confidently like Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. I have kept the faith" [**2 Tim. 4: 7**].

Alleluia!