

IS JESUS REALLY THE AUTHOR OF YOUR FAITH?

Today's Text: Heb. 12:1-17

Extracts:

Therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us *run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith*, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, *lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls*. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin [Heb. 12: 1-4]

Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, a 39-year-old aristocratic conservative, was the German Defence Minister who was seen as a possible successor to Chancellor Angela Merkel.¹ In 2011, it was discovered that more than half of his 475-page Bayreuth University doctorate thesis had been copied from other people's works without attributing the sources. After an unprecedented 50,000 German academics and their supporters signed an open letter to Chancellor Merkel protesting about his plagiarism, which they said had made a "mockery" of the country's long-established reputation for academic and scientific integrity, Guttenberg was forced to resign.

Guttenberg lost his academic integrity because he had copied other people's ideas without giving them due credit. Do you know how many believers have "plagiarized" Jesus Christ without giving Him due credit as the author of their faith? They claim to be using His authority but are relying on unholy and demonic techniques to hoodwink their congregations. They hardly know or rely on Jesus. Many of us call Jesus Lord but do not obey Him but persist in sinning. To such people, Jesus has also said, "I never knew you; depart from Me you who practise lawlessness!" [Matt. 7: 23].

In today's Bible text, we are told to look up to Jesus, "the author and finisher" of our faith. Is Jesus really the author of your faith or that of your congregation? Let us find out from today's challenging study.

¹ Story is based on the following sources: "German Defence Minister Guttenberg resigns over thesis," *BBC News*, 1 March 2011; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-12608083> ; and Tony Peterson, "German Defence Minister quits over PhD plagiarism scandal," *the Independent*, Wednesday 2 March 2011; <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/german-defence-minister-quits-over-phd-plagiarism-scandal-2229492.html>

1. Background: Don't be a plagiarist!

In the Scriptures, we are told that without faith it is IMPOSSIBLE to please God, and that those who come to Him MUST believe that He is, and that He rewards those who DILIGENTLY seek Him [**Heb. 11: 6**]. For most of us raised on a diet of empirical science [to believe only what you can prove by sight, touch, smell, taste or hearing], faith looks far-fetched. It is defined as the “substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” [v. 1]. That suggests that faith, *true faith, can only come from a higher source that can see the end from the beginning. It has nothing to do with your boldness or optimism. It comes from whom you trust, that is, somebody who has demonstrated over time that s(he) is reliable, no matter the circumstances that you face.*

Speaking to His disciples while He was still with them, Jesus said, “Let not your heart be troubled; *you believe in God, believe also in Me... I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*” [**Jn 14: 1-6**]. Those are not the words of a plagiarist or con artist! The challenge is which Jesus do you know?² Most of us are looking for Jesus the breadwinner or the religious leader [**Jn 4: 15, 19-20**] but the Jesus that can lead us to salvation is the Messiah [**vv. 25-26**]. That Jesus has demonstrated why we can and should trust Him, why He is the author and finisher of our faith as follows:

a) *His Father has confirmed that Jesus is His beloved and only begotten Son*

At His baptism by John the Baptist, a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” [**Matt. 3: 17**]. When He took three of His disciples, Peter, James and John, up into the mountain, He was transfigured before them. Moses and Elijah appeared before Him. Peter called for three tabernacles to be made- one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah. Immediately, a voice came from heaven saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” [**Matt. 17: 1-5**]. Confirming the impact of that experience on him, Peter wrote as he approached death, “[We] did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty; for He received from God the Father honour and glory when such a voice came from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain” [**2 Pet. 1: 16-18**]. Therefore, Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father [**Phil. 2: 11**].

b) *Jesus demonstrated His obedience to His Father by giving up His life for us*

² http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume_12/WhichJesusdoyouknow.pdf

We are told that Jesus, “for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame” [Heb. 12: 2]. Even though He was God, He made Himself of no reputation by taking the form of a mere man like us, obeyed His Father to the point of death on the cross so as to give us (sinners) salvation. Consequently, His Father has elevated His name above every other name; “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven ... on earth and ... under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” [Phil. 2: 5-11]. ***Therefore, Jesus is best placed to empathise with our weaknesses and trials*** [Heb. 4: 15].

c) *He remains with us always to the time of His return*

We are told, “let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” [Heb. 12: 1-2]. On the day of His ascension into heaven, He assured us (through His disciples), “lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” [Matt. 28: 20]. He will never leave nor forsake those who trust in Him [Heb. 13: 5].

From the forgoing, the choice is ours. We can play the plagiarist, the copyist or deceiver who can prophesy or cast out demons or perform wonders in the name of Jesus but do not obey Him [Matt. 7: 21-23]! Like the crowds who ran after Jesus for more miraculous feeding festivals, we may be looking for bread but not salvation [Jn. 6: 22-26]. ***The Christ that serves as the author and finisher of our faith is the one that will lead us to salvation. That is the One we are to look for and trust.*** Are you ready for that challenge?

2. How to become a “finished” person of faith!

In the words of Jesus, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you” [Jn 15: 15-16]. He is the vine and His followers are the branches, and without Him, they can do nothing [v. 5]. Therefore, if you want Jesus to be the author and finisher of your faith, you must pay attention to some basic principles, some of which are as follows:

a) *Anchor your faith on Jesus, not on your church/denominational doctrine!*

Many of us know how to drive a vehicle. Most of us have the driver’s licence. But how many of us are called drivers? In like manner, most of us claim to be Christians or believers or born-again. But how many of us are true followers of Jesus Christ? Instead, the Christianity we practise is based on our church/denominational doctrines! When we follow them religiously, we pat ourselves on the back, thinking that we have done Christ’s will.

In addressing the contentions in the early church at Corinth, Paul wrote [**1 Cor. 1: 10-13**]:

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me... that there are contentions among you... that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Therefore, you may need to audit your faith and be convinced that it is anchored on Jesus and Him alone; not on your Pope or pastor or evangelist.

b) *Let your fruits of faith show you as Christ's disciple!*

Many of us think that signs and wonders are a clear manifestation of God's presence through Jesus, but Jesus Himself has taught us that we shall be known by our fruits because there are many wolves in sheep's clothing [**Matt. 7: 15-16**]. He has already warned us that as we approach end-times, "false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" [**Matt. 24: 24**].

For example, in the city of Samaria, during the early Christian era, there was a sorcerer called Simon who claimed to be great. In fact, people perceived him as "a great power of God." But when Philip came there and preached Jesus Christ, the sorcerer also believed and was baptized [**Acts 8: 4-13**]. However, when Peter and John came there, and Simon saw that people received the Holy Spirit through their laying hands on them, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." Peter rebuked him because his heart was not right in the sight of God [**Vv. 14-23**]. See also what some exorcists tried to do at Ephesus where God had worked "unusual miracles by the hands of Paul so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them." Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, joined some itinerant Jewish exorcists to say over some people who had evil spirits, "We exorcise you by the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches." The evil spirit answered, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" [**Acts 19: 11-16**]. Paul's faith, like that of Peter and John, was anchored on Jesus but the exorcists did not know Him!

A recent example comes from the Jubilee Christian Centre (JCC) in Penarth Street, London, UK³. The sermons of a popular 45-year-old preacher were watched by many on a video-sharing site on YouTube. Following a report from an under- 16-year-old girl that she had been taken to a private office, forced to undress before oil was poured over her, the Metropolitan Police opened an investigation that confirmed that such sexual assault had been supported by another victim. The pastor and his secretary were charged to court and sentenced to prison for over three years each by the Inner London Crown Court. Commenting on the case, a top police officer said the convicts “preyed on their victims’ vulnerabilities, while satisfying their own sexual urges under the guise of private prayer.”

But take the case of Peter and John who were brought before the Jewish council on trial for daring to teach and preach on the resurrection of the dead by Christ Jesus. Even after being kept in detention overnight, they remained as bold as ever concerning Jesus as the only basis for salvation. When they were brought before the Jewish leaders, we are told they were filled with the Holy Spirit. So, when the Jewish leaders “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: 1-13]. Jesus was the author and finisher of their faith! Therefore, as you go from one fellowship or “revival service” to another, be convinced that the Christ you trust is the foundation of your faith.

c) *Remain faithful to the end*

What use is your faith if it does not take you to eternity in heaven? That suggests the need for endurance and the ability to bear pains. Have you yet resisted to bloodshed striving against sin [Heb. 12: 4]? Chastening is painful but in the long run “it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” [v. 11].

Writing about what he had suffered for the Gospel’s sake, Paul said, “I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day” [2 Tim. 1: 12]. His faith was anchored firmly on Jesus Christ. Therefore, you cannot afford to relax.

In sum, here is the heart of the matter. A valid coin has two sides- a head and a tail. The head of the faith coin is who you put your trust in, no matter what. The tail is what you believe in, your faith. When your faith is anchored on a deep relationship with God through His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who has

³ Abdullahi Tasiu Abubakar, “Nigerian’ pastor jailed in London for sexual assault,” *Daily Trust*, April 2, 2017; <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/general/-nigerian-pastor-jailed-in-london-for-sexual-assault/191723.html>

His Father's mandate for our salvation, your profession of faith is deeply anchored. Every step you take is pleasing to and acceptable to Him. Once you keep it up, Jesus becomes and remains the author and finisher of your faith. That is the sum of today's study.

3. Conclusion: Make Jesus the Author and Finisher of your faith!

Jesus once told His disciples, "You are My friends if you do *whatever I command you*. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but *I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you*" [Jn 15: 14-15].

What a privilege for you to be called the friend of Jesus! Your faith in God is rock-solid. Your trust in Him is impregnable. Jesus is the author and finisher of your faith.

Congratulations!