

## The Difficult Business Of Trusting God

Some of you have read the book called "The Heavenly Man". If you haven't, you should. It's the story of Brother Yun, a Chinese Pastor who from 1982 to 2002, was persecuted and tortured in China for preaching the gospel. It is such a compelling story, I couldn't put the book down. It's the nearest thing I've read to someone in our generation living a life like that of the life of the Apostle Paul. Brother Yun spent seven of those 20 years in prison for his faith. Many times he was tortured to the point of death, yet refused to deny Christ. On one occasion, when locked in a maximum security prison, with his legs broken from a beating he had received by the prison guards, The Lord showed him in a vision of how he was going to miraculously be released from prison. It happened just as he had seen in the vision. His legs were instantly healed. He walked through three high security barriers, past 30 different guards, right out through the front doors of the prison. At each high security barrier, the doors opened for him, and the guards didn't see him. On another occasion, he went on a hunger strike, and refused to eat or drink for 74 days. Miraculously, God kept him alive.

It's an amazing true story, verified by eyewitness accounts, of how a man trusted God, and saw miracle after miracle of God's intervention. If Brother Yun, who now lives in Germany, were to come to our church, and you were to ask him, "Can God be trusted?", he would say "Absolutely!"

- **What About When God Doesn't Deliver?**

But for every story like that of Brother Yun, I can think of another where Christians have trusted God and not seen the prison doors open. A day after I had read the book, I bumped into John. John is a quietly spoken unassuming man in my previous church, who over the years has trusted God, but hasn't seen the miracles happen. When his two children were small kids at school, his wife worked as a post woman. One morning she was hit by a car, and was taken to hospital. She suffered a severe brain injury. From that day to this, she hasn't recognised John, her children, or any of the people who loved her. That was over 20 years ago. I asked John about his kids. One of them, after years of study and training as a pilot has had to give up flying because of a medical condition. The other, a very talented designer, was recently admitted to hospital suffering from severe depression. As I talked with John I thanked God that he was still trusting God, when so many things beyond his control had gone wrong with his life.

- **Telling The Whole Story.**

One of the things we love to do as Christians is to tell all the stories that end happily ever after. The child that was healed when a group of Christians prayed in faith. The money that God miraculously provided when there was a shortfall. The marriage that was reconciled when believing friends trusted God. We love to read the stories in the Bible of the great men and women of God who walked on water, raised the dead and believed God in impossible circumstances and saw miracles happen. It's good that we tell those stories. But when we tell them, we need to be aware of the hundreds of people who have trusted God with just as much faith, and have not seen miracles happen. Genuine believers with genuine faith, who in the quietness of their hearts are asking the question "Can God be trusted?" Christians who grapple with questions of doubt and faith, but feel guilty if they talk about their doubts, because they know they are supposed to trust God anyway.

- **Does It All Depend On Our Faith?**

I can understand why people who have been through tough circumstances and have never seen a miracle find it difficult to believe that God can be trusted. Philip Yancey writes of a church in Indiana that he investigated where they believed the promise of Jesus that faith the size of a grain of mustard seed can move mountains; that anything can happen if two or three gather together in prayer. These people believed that the Christian life is meant to be a life of victory and triumph and any less than that indicated a lack of faith. So when anyone got sick, they didn't go to the doctor. They trusted God to heal. But the problem was, pregnant women in that church died in childbirth at eight times the national average, and young children were three times more likely to die. In all, 58 people from that church had died because they

trusted God rather than get medical treatment. If you were part of that congregation, wouldn't you doubt that God could be trusted?

- **Doubters In The Bible.**

If you read through the Bible carefully, you will find lots of people who doubted that God could be trusted. Elijah, who had been so full of faith in God when he had a contest with 600 pagan priests on Mt Carmel, saw God work in tremendous power. Fire falling from the sky that was so intense it even burnt up rocks and water. Yet, straight after this amazing proof of Gods ability to work miracles, he's running for his life, then hiding in a cave in a fit of depression so deep he asks God to take his life. Read Judges, Chapter 6 and the story of Gideon. He has a conversation with an angel, but he still doubts that he can trust God. So then he asks for a sign. God gives him an answer, but still he's not convinced. So then he goes on to put this fleece out in the open air to see if it will get wet with the dew. God gives him another sign, but he just wants to double check again, because he's still not sure if he can trust God. In the New Testament you find more examples of people who found it hard to trust God. The disciples of Jesus had been with him when he had healed people of leprosy, delivered people from demons, raised people from the dead, fed 5000 people and calmed a storm. Yet when they are in another storm, they didn't trust God at all. They panicked. And Thomas, who had been with Jesus three years, and who had witnessed all the things Jesus had done, still wouldn't believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. This is what John says about Thomas in his Gospel **"Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:24 – 29)**

It doesn't take much of a reading of the Bible to realise that even people who had trusted God in the past, and had seen him do amazing miracles, still found it difficult to trust him in an ongoing basis. If you are finding it difficult to trust God, you are in good company.

- **Would Solid Evidence Convince You?**

Ask yourself this question. If God answered every prayer you prayed and if He worked miracles in your life on a daily basis, so that every day you could count on him to provide your food, speak to you with specific instructions, and lead you in the direction you needed to go, would you trust Him? What if God visibly showed up with solid proof of his presence? Would you trust Him?

There was a time when God spoke to Moses face to face, as you and I would speak to a friend. They met together in a tent, pitched just outside the Israelite camp. Everyone knew it was happening. Whenever Moses went to the tent to meet with God, the whole nation turned out to watch. A pillar of cloud, which was Gods visible presence, blocked the entrance to the tent. Only Moses knew what God had said, but the people knew that God had been present, because when Moses came out of that tent, he was glowing like a space alien. The people couldn't even bear to look at him until he covered his face with a veil. No one doubted God was with them. They could see his presence in the thick storm clouds around Mt Sinai. If anyone wanted to test the reality of Gods presence, they only had to touch the mountain to be convinced, for they would be dead a second later. God wasn't playing hide and seek with these people. He was there in a pillar of cloud by day, and in a pillar of fire at night. He fed them every day with supernatural food. These people had crossed over a sea on dry ground. They had drunk water from a rock. They had every proof of Gods existence you could ask for. But did they trust him? These same people got bored with God. They were impatient with him. They complained about him. Even though God gave them every reason to trust him, they made a golden calf as an idol, and worshipped that instead.

- **More Miracles = Less Trust?**

Here's the staggering thing. The more God revealed himself, the less people trusted him. The more miracles people saw, the less they believed. Those Israelites who wandered in the desert, who had a twenty four hour a day reminder of the presence of God, yet they rebelled against him 10 times in the space of 40 years.

- **We Don't Get It All Now.**

Hebrews Chapter 11 contains a list of many of the great Bible characters who trusted God. Noah who built a boat 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high, just because God told him to do it. Abraham, who trusted God by leaving his homeland and going to a land that God promised him, even though he had never been there before. Moses, who trusted God, and defied the mighty Pharaoh of Egypt. Hebrews Chapter 11 lists a whole bunch of people who trusted God to win battles, shut the mouths of lions, raise dead people back to life, overcome torture and persecution, - people who were stoned to death, sawn in two - it's just horrific what they went through in trusting God. Yet at the end of the chapter it says this **"These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect." (Heb 11:39 & 40 NIV)** The way I understand that scripture is that no matter how much we have trusted God in the past, no matter how many miracles we have seen or haven't seen, we won't get all the answers to all our questions until we enter the next life. As the Apostle Paul put it **"Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." (1 Cor. 13:12 NIV)**

- **Trusting Despite The Doubts**

I began this message by talking about the life of Brother Yun. What I shared at the beginning was only part of the story. Yes he did see God work in miraculous ways. But there were also years of suffering, torture and despair when he was locked up in prison. There were days when he doubted that God cared for him at all. There were times in prayer, when like King David in the Psalms, he got angry at God, and demanded to know what God was doing. There were times of doubt when he was so despondent he asked God to kill him. But the evidence of God at work in his life was too compelling for him to ignore. If you were to ask him "Can God be trusted?" he would still say "Absolutely!" It's the same for me, and for millions of Christians like me. The evidence of God at work in my world is too compelling for me to ignore. Despite my doubts, I trust Him. Like thousands of Christians before me I hold on to the words of Jesus; **"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."**

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