

## Leader Notes

### *Equipment needed*

- *Butchers Paper*

### *Pray*

## **Introduction**

Welcome to week 2 of this edition of 5pm Church Family Together. Last week we considered the Question 'Can I trust the Bible?' and we looked at many of the evidences that were helpful not in 'proving' the Bible, but in considering it objectively as a historically attested ancient manuscript that in fact is the reliable word of God. This week we consider the question 'Can I trust my faith?'.

Like last week, this question is not new, but unlike last week this question may at first seem harder to answer objectively.

**Question:** How would those in our work teams answer the question: 'What is faith?'

## **Christian Faith – groundless and useless?**

For many in our secular spheres, the idea of Christian faith is something that is both *groundless* and *useless*. Asking the Christian and the answer should be the opposite – faith is both grounded and useful. When we talk about Christian faith we are talking in an area that is opposite to so many of the worldviews that we live with day in and out in Adelaide.

The idea of 'Faith' has got some bad press.

### ➤ *On the whiteboard*

FAITH	FACTS
<i>Faith is thought to be:</i>	<i>Facts are thought to be:</i>
<i>Wishful thinking</i>	<i>Evidence based</i>
<i>Subjective</i>	<i>Objective</i>
<i>Personally attested</i> <i>(Therefore not as reliable)</i>	<i>Corporately attested</i> <i>(Therefore more reliable)</i>
<i>A Private matter</i> <i>(emotional, fanciful)</i>	<i>Of Public Concern</i> <i>(idealistic, popular)</i>

*- and so should not shape public, social or political realities.*

The Bible only commends faith or belief flowing from facts with clear evidence (Luke 1:1-4; John 20:31)

**Exercise** (*in fours on Butchers paper*):

Can you trust your Christian Faith?

For what reasons?	What has caused doubts?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Bible</li><li>- Relationships</li><li>- Meaning</li><li>- Reliable history</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- not seeing God</li><li>- suffering</li><li>- challenge</li><li>- other religions</li></ul>

### **Is Christian Faith groundless?**

Let's think about faith. What is faith? Hebrews 11 can be very helpful [*READ Heb 11*].

*Notice verse one, we almost have a definition – 'faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see'.*

*And to back up the point the author offers many examples of saints who lived by faith (and these were not 'perfect' examples of faith) – we, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Joseph, Moses' Parents, Moses, the Israelites, Rahab, Gibeon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the Prophets.*

*And their experience of living by faith was not always a comfortable one (c.f. Heb 11:35b-38)*

Faith is something that governs a person – their thoughts, decisions and actions.

### **Where does Christian faith come from?**

*Romans 10:17 – 'Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ'*

*John 20:29-31 – Jesus helps Thomas to grasp his faith and makes the point that those (unlike Thomas) who didn't get to see him yet have believed are more blessed.*

*And John makes clear the basis of the faith he has in writing the gospel:*

*'Jesus did many miraculous signs in the presence of this disciples which are not recorded in this book [the gospel]. But these are written that you may*

*believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.'*

*Revealed – Jesus showed himself and gave many signs.*

*Recorded – John as put it down (some of it) .*

*Read & Receive – So that we can read about Jesus and make our decision to believe.*

### **Implication**

Christians can and should be....

*a) Sceptical of other faith systems.*

*If the basis of Christian faith has been recorded in order to be examined, then it will stand against (to be compared if need be) other faith systems and the conclusion will be telling.*

*Faith systems are not the same.*

*Those other faiths which have a 'holy book' can be examined.*

*The secular expression: 'All religions are essentially the same thing!' is like me saying all dogs look the same!*

The **Bible** for *Christianity* is all about Jesus (the Old Testament pointing too and the New Testament unequivocally centred on him).

The **Qur'an** for *Islam* rejects that Jesus was the Son of God.

The **Torah** for *Judaism* (although for Christians is fulfilled by Jesus) makes no mention of Jesus and so Jews refuse to believe that Jesus was the messiah

The **Vedas** for *Hinduism* does not know about Jesus

The **Tipitaka** for *Buddhism* does not know Jesus

*b) Recognise that all people (not just Christians) are people of faith*

*This may seem a surprising thing to say, but it is not that radical. All people live according to what they believe (that is even the request of the atheist who says they don't believe anything).*

*Faith is something that governs a person – their thoughts, decisions and actions.*

The real question – Is what we believe reliable?

*Romans 1:25 indicated that it is very possible a person could exchange something true for a lie.*

### **Is Christian Faith useless?**

So is Christian faith grounded – Yes it has a grounding.

Is that grounding reliable? – Given what we looked at last week – Yes.

So the next logical question is: Is there any benefit in Christian Faith?

Apologetically, this is where many of conversation may lead, only to be halted by the person saying ‘I don’t care!’

**Question (in fours):** How would you answer a secular colleague who may ask: Is there any benefit in being a Christian?

*What if... having faith immediately meant that you gained great wealth, amazing health, improved relationships, perfect marriage or significant and meaningful friendships, excellent job and visible success?*

*If those around you saw this new status – would there be any problem?*

*People could see and then be able to give themselves straight to it. Why not?*

### **The reality of faith**

#### *1. Relationship with God*

- *Adopted Children (John 1:12, Romans 8:15)*
- *Communication*
  - *Prayer*
  - *Word*
- *Church Family*
- *Inheritance (1 Peter 1:3-12)*

*What is most important in life is not what you achieve or earn, but who you do life with. Christian faith is about life.*

### **Persuading others to Faith**

As witnesses for the gospel (Acts 1:8), there are many opportunities which can cross our path where we can defend the truth behind our faith with those whom we live, work or play with – but we don't always feel ready and prepared to do this.

*Apologetics* and *evangelism* by their very nature, are about helping someone change. The task is to help people, in a carefully and thoughtful way, to change their minds, beliefs, attitudes or lives to a position of acceptance of the gospel. Now of course that is an endeavour that should be treated with a great deal of respect, as we ourselves might not appreciate another trying to change us, then others might not appreciate us trying to change what can be very heartfelt beliefs and views.

In many cases asking someone to change a viewpoint, may attack several layers of the person's outlook on life. Such changes could ask the person to go against peer groups, family upbringing, their understanding of the world, and/or the goals and desires they may have for their future.

Any change involving God will probably have deep implications. So to ask someone to repent and believe (be baptised) as the Apostle Peter does when speaking to the crowd in Jerusalem (Acts 2:38), it would have been akin to asking them to jettison their ancestral faith, their cultural sensitivities, and in most cases go against their families. But that is the nature of the gospel.

The gospel calls for change – even change that is difficult.

So how do we graciously call for change in people? Unfortunately Christians often make the gospel harder to accept that God would make it! Our style in presenting, our behaviour or attitude can unwittingly put up blocks to someone changing. What is for sure is that Christians should intentionally work to find ways to be witnesses of the gospel making sure that the only offence or barrier we create is that of the gospel itself. No offence would be good, but if taken, we want it to be about what is said, not how it is said.

#### **Exercise:**

In groups, read through one of the following sections of John's Gospel looking for the way Jesus talks to people.

- John 2:1-25
- John 3:1-36
- John 4:1-42

a. What characteristic do you see in manner and style?

b. How does he treat people?

## **Rules for engagement!**

So what should the rules for engagement be?

### *1. Love people.*

Being Christians means having a genuine love for those we talk to – and yes that can be harder with some than others!

Consider Jesus' attitude (his 'compassion') to the crowds in the towns and villages he visited (Matt 9:35-38) and his love ('his heart went out to her') to the widow of Nain whose son died (Luke 7:11-17).

### *2. Be Truthful*

Don't paint a dud, the gospel is nothing like it. We want people to accept the gospel, not the gospel plus! Care should be taken to ensure we don't promise more than the gospel promises now (e.g. the gospel does not promise that we will be healed, that we will be wealthy, that our burdens will be taken away if we accept it – at least not now, that is a promise for heaven).

The rich youth ruler in Mark 10:17-31 would love to have heard that becoming Christian meant that he could love both God and Money – Jesus held to the truth even though the man went away without embracing the gospel.

### *3. Be Strong (as required)*

Being a witness to the gospel will sometime mean saying things that others will find hard to hear. Sensitive, yet still clear and strong will often help the person know that their attitude needs to change. Think of the many interactions that Jesus had with Pharisees, teachers of the Law and elders (e.g. The parable of the tenants to highlight the problem with questioning the authority of Jesus – Mark 11:27-12:12)

### *4. Allow freedom*

God gives us brains and allows us freedom to make the decisions that we do (even if he knows how we will decide). Christians should not coerce to convert!

## **Helping to bring Change**

There are a number of practical ways we can help a person consider change.

### *1. Give plenty of room*

Christians are not sales people. Don't narrow the options for the person as if we were trying to sell them the gospel. Give them space to ask questions, and to challenge, and to change their mind. Our task is to listen before speaking and speaking what may help.

### *2. Be an example*

Words are important because they are the clearest expression of why anything is done (hence the reason the Bible is the best expression of who God is), but words without actions can appear

shallow. Intentionally walking the talk is a wonderful way to show people what you believe and what that looks like. (1 Peter 2:12).

*3. Allow distance between people and problems*

Separate the *problem* from the *person*. One someone argues they usually start arguing a *position* first. And if in your conversation that *position* is shown to be faulty or wanting, then what easily happens is they will switch to arguing as a *personal* stance. It is helpful to allow people to see that their ideas are detached from their personal integrity. As such the person does not 'lose face'.

*4. Avoid 'Right' and 'Wrong'*

'Right' verse 'wrong' is confrontational and there are times when that is necessary, but if the conversation can stay away from 'absolutes' at least initially then you might find conversation will go further.

**Reflection:**

What has been most helpful for you, in thinking about how we talk and answer questions about faith?

*Pray*