
The Promises of Jesus: Faith Like a Child or So What?

by John and Sylvia Ronsvalle
from the August/September 2014 *Opportunities* newsletter

You don't hope for things you already have.

So, if we're still in the hoping stage, what Paul the apostle wrote might be helpful: "But if we look forward to something we don't have yet, we must wait patiently and confidently" (Romans 8:25, New Living Translation).

The writer of Hebrews says hope and faith are related: "What is faith? It is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. It is the evidence of things we cannot see" (Hebrews 11:1, NLT).

Jesus tells us about faith by focusing on children: "I assure you, unless you turn from your sins and become as little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 18:3, NLT).

Why does Jesus urge grown-ups to imitate children?

Well, grown-ups have lived longer and had time to meet with more defeat.

For example, none of us has been able to prevent a loved one from dying ultimately by believing it wouldn't/shouldn't happen.

Part of the process of "growing up" is accumulating experiences, both good and bad. Those experiences shape how we view the world. As Judy Collins sang, "I've looked at clouds from both sides now ..."

That's not to say that some of what children believe shouldn't be shaped differently, too. A major challenge of parenting, for example, is teaching children not to trust everyone and yet not to fear everyone.

A major challenge for grown-ups is not to receive everything we believe we should have, and yet still to keep believing. It's very easy as we grow up to develop armor as a result of our disappointments. Instead of hoping, we look at something like Jesus' promises and say, "So what? A dollar and that promise will get you a cup of coffee" (that used to be a "nickel"!).

Here is where Jesus' wisdom about faith like a child may give us legs to stand on.

If we're honest, we live in a world that in many ways is beyond our understanding.

For example, the idea of infinite space can make your brain hurt. No matter what the explanation, the question remains: what's on the other side of any boundary?

Then there's the question of how did anything start. Before the "big bang" or "God-particle" is the question of what was before and where did that particle come from?

Where, for that matter, did the eternal God come from?

We must take for granted that the things around us exist. And here's the point: we go on.

One might say this is the "irrationality" of the universe that we're willing to live with. The term "irrational" is used here as a way to say that a lot around us doesn't make apparent sense. So we make room for the reality of living in infinite space and using the things that exist, even while we don't know their backstory.

Jesus' promises may be similar. Jesus says we can have anything we ask for. He not only says it in John 14:13-14. He repeats it in John 15:16 and John 16:23-24.

We can respond to this promise in two different childlike ways.

We can pout because of past disappointments and refuse to try. We can say, "My little effort won't solve the whole problem" or "Given that I've asked before and not received, so what?"

Or we can hold on to the wonder even in the face of confusing experiences. We can decide the promise is true, and choose to believe that Someone is in control of the big picture made up of moving parts that our minds are not yet able to capture.

Apparently, faith involves choice: 1) Be open to possibilities, or 2) Ignore them.

Over the years we've seen people choose again and again to pursue the possibilities: feeding the hungry; clothing people; repairing homes and providing furniture, providing resources for prescriptions and people's bills. Your donations keep the doors open and services available six days a week, as well as make room to research and challenge the church about increased potential on a broader level.

Even with all this going on, we also invite you to consider another possibility. Through the Mission Match Discipleship Tree we are working to mobilize churches to increase missions giving as a portion of their total congregational spending. You may wonder: Can someone really do that for a single gift of \$48 a year? Even when that gift combines with others to become matching contributions offered to churches, will my small step of faith really make a difference?

Well, do not send \$48 for the Mission Match Discipleship Tree now (whoa! That's not your everyday fundraising approach!). You can check the box on the return envelope or email Shannon at <arborist1@emptytomb.org> to explore this possibility. And then, if you like, your Web-based invitation can be sent to you. *Then* your \$48 can combine with others.

Jesus said in John 14:12 that we, as the body of Christ, can do greater things than he did.

That's a promise we choose to have faith in. So we continue to hope.