

FAITH WITHOUT HATS

A Devotional Meditation from

Exodus 13:17-17:16, Judges 4:4-5:31; Genesis 22:1-19;
Matthew 14:22-33; Luke 18:1-8; John 6:60-70, 20:19-29; Philippians 3:17-21

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On a fine, sunny day in Florida, a woman took her three grandsons to the beach for a day of fun. Being a responsible grandmother, she cautioned the boys about the ocean's dangerous undertow, charged the older ones to look out for their little brother, and then found a comfortable place in the shade where she could keep watch over them. As happens with young boys, they quickly fell to playing in the sand and surf, and soon forgot everything their grandmother had said. The older ones found some playmates who joined them in diving into the waves, while the youngest wandered off in search of shells. The grandmother saw him walk away, and immediately went after him, but before she could get there, he had veered into the surf, where the undertow pulled him away from the shore. The boy panicked and started to go under. Fortunately, there was a lifeguard stationed at that very spot. He was already jumping into action as the frantic grandmother appealed to him to save the little boy. An instant later, he had reached the child and lifted him out of the water. And a good thing, too, for the boy was on the verge of drowning. Once the lifeguard had him back on the beach, he applied mouth-to-mouth resuscitation until the boy expelled the water from his lungs and was breathing on his own.



Boy Playing on Beach with Pail and Shovel. Photo by Chris McBrien, June 5, 2011, [via Flickr](#).

The grandmother was right there every second, praying fervently. When her grandson was out of danger, she scooped him up in her arms and began thanking the lifeguard profusely. Then she stopped, glanced at the little boy, and with a new expression of concern on her face said, "He had a hat."

We laugh about this because we have all done something similar. Crisis comes, and in an instant, we realize what is really important in life. Then salvation arrives, the crisis is forgotten, and we have a revelation about what is really important according to our priorities. One moment we can be thanking our savior, whether it's a doctor, a firefighter, a neighbor, or whomever has supplied the relief we need. The next moment, we might be irritated that something was lost in the ordeal. Worse yet, we might focus so intently on what was lost that we end up cursing the very one who brought us through the crisis.

This is another aspect of our human nature that our Creator has been bringing to our attention from time immemorial. One of many biblical examples is in the Exodus story. Having seen God's mighty deliverance from their bondage in Egypt, our Hebrew

ancestors panicked when Pharaoh's army trapped them at the seashore. Then, when God delivered them again, they all sang His praises, saying,

Sing to *ADONAI*, for He is highly exalted!
The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!

Exodus 15:21 TLV

But three days later, they began complaining about a lack of good water, and when God remedied that situation, they complained about having inadequate food. In fact, their complaints bordered on cursing their Deliverer when they said to Moses and Aaron,

If only we had died by the hand of *ADONAI* in the land of Egypt, when we sat by pots of meat, when we ate bread until we were full. But you have brought us into the wilderness, to kill this entire congregation with hunger.

Exodus 16:3 TLV

It is at this point that we begin to wonder about the true motivation of these Hebrews and the mixed multitude who came with them out of Egypt. Why did they align themselves with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Was it because the alternative was either death in the plagues, or a very hard life rebuilding the shattered Egyptian kingdom? Was it because they yearned for a life of freedom, away from Pharaoh's oppression? Was it because they believed that God had something better for them as His people living in His land? Or was it that they wanted to stuff their bellies with whatever they pleased, whenever they pleased, without interference from Pharaoh, or God, or anyone else?

We don't like to admit that that latter option is common among those who profess to be God's people. Apparently it was common in Paul's day as well, as we see in comments from his letters like this one:

Brothers and sisters, join in following my example and notice those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. (For many walk who are enemies of the cross of Messiah—I have often told you about them, and now I am even weeping as I tell you. Their end is destruction—their god is their belly and their glory is in their shame. They set their minds on earthly things.)

Philippians 3:17-19 TLV

It's the setting our minds on earthly things that gets us into trouble. That's what Peter did when he was walking on the water toward Messiah Yeshua, and then decided to look at his circumstances rather than at the One Who made him able to overcome those circumstances. Reaching out to save him, Yeshua said to Peter, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:31)

That's the same thing He said through Moses to the people of Israel long ago, and the same thing He says to us right now. He knew those ancient Hebrews needed water and food to survive, and He was quite prepared to provide for their needs. It is a testimony to their doubt and lack of faith that He provided manna in the wilderness, because their small faith required an endless supply of miraculous interventions to keep them motivated and loyal. But what if there had been no manna? Would they have remained faithful even then? That's a question our Messiah asked His disciples when most of His followers walked away, demonstrating that they, too, were more interested in having their fleshly

desires gratified rather than wrestling with deeper, more difficult eternal truths. Peter had learned something from his previous experiences, which is why he said,

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life! We have trusted and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.

John 6:68-69 TLV

That's what our Redeemer God is looking for – not blind obedience, and not conditional followers, but real disciples who cling to Him because He is the Source of all life. This is why He tests us, and keeps testing us until we choose to walk away, or pass the test and move up to the next level of obedience. It's why He tested our fathers and mothers in the wilderness with hunger and thirst – a test they seem to have failed. It's also why He tested our father Abraham to the point of having him put a knife to his son Isaac's throat before intervening to tell the Patriarch he had passed the test with flying colors.

What will He say about us in this generation? Do we crave His signs and miracles because we won't believe any other way, or do we trust Him because He is God, and that's enough – even if we're not quite sure where He's taking us, or why? That's the kind of faith He is seeking in His people. We understand that from something else He said to His disciples. Remember when “doubting” Thomas missed the first visit of the resurrected Lord to His closest friends? He said he wouldn't believe until he saw Yeshua and could put his fingers in his wounds. When Yeshua came to visit again, Thomas immediately dropped his doubt and confessed his belief. That's when the Lord said,

Because you have seen Me, you have believed? Blessed are the ones who have not seen and yet have believed!

John 20:29 TLV

The ones who haven't seen, and yet still believe, are the ones who don't care whether they come out of the trials with their hats or not. They just want to be near their Redeemer, now and for all eternity.

Maybe if there are enough people with that kind of commitment, our Savior will find faith in the earth when He returns to complete our redemption.