

Wrestling with Faith...
Heb. 10:19-23, 35-36-11:1-3

Last week we began by asking the question, "when was the last time you wrestled with someone or something?" And we were real specific about the type of wrestling, this wasn't TNA or WWE wrestling but rather they type of wrestling that takes place in the Olympics. I showed you some highlights from the Olympic wrestling competition a few years ago in Beijing and then we said that in order to be good at wrestling we each have to have two things, conditioning and balance. Without being in shape and learning how to balance your weight and that of your opponents it's nearly impossible to last in ring. We also said the same is true of wrestling with issues as well; in fact we wrestle all the time. We wrestle with decisions and values, we wrestle with issues like trust and relationships, we even wrestle with God. And we spent a lot of time last week looking at what it takes to wrestle with God. How he wants to wrestle with us in order to train and equip us, he doesn't want to wrestle against us. But many times we choose to wrestle God to the point of submission, where we submit to Him. And even though it hurts and is tough to work through, it's worth it because in the end we are able to produce a harvest of righteousness and peace. I think it's safe to say that is what we all want, we don't want our lives to produce brokenness, we don't want our lives to produce war and conflict, and we want our lives to produce righteous and peace, which are both attributes of God. But how do we get there?

That's sort of where we are going tonight, we're going to wrestle tonight with the concept of faith. To kick things off tonight Michael and Gerald our going to demonstrate a type of wrestling for us, what we are going to do is tie one of each of their wrist together and have them attempt to poke each other with this piece of foam noodle. On the end of the noodle is syrup, so afterwards we are going to have at least one sticky guy.

The point here is that in order to spin and throw the others weight they both needed to be balanced and conditioned, but obviously one was a little more equipped than the other. If they hadn't been in somewhat of shape and at least had a little balance it would have been a quick match and not nearly as entertaining, why they wouldn't have moved. What caused them to spin each other around and try to dodge the syrup? It was the reality that if they didn't move they believed they would get blasted with syrup and obviously they were right. You see the same is true of faith, faith is believing in something you can't see even though there is evidence for it. Now most of us are ok with this, we have faith in God. We've seen some of the evidence and we are pretty comfortable saying He exist, even though few of us live this way. Let me give you a few examples of what I mean. I've done everything I can to prepare for this lesson today, so in theory it should go well, but let's say it doesn't. Why not? Was it because I'm lying and really

didn't do my best, possibly? Was it because my best wasn't good enough, definitely? My best is never going to be good enough, that's why I need Jesus. Jesus takes the best I have, and provides a way for making me good in God's eyes. All that aside though, what if the lesson isn't that great tonight because God didn't want it to be? Is that fair? What if you're not dating that person you want to be with because God doesn't want you to? What if you didn't get into the college you wanted to because God didn't want you to? What if you didn't make the team because God didn't want you to? I'm not saying he does or he doesn't, but if that's the case, because let's face it there are things that we want that God doesn't, then how do you feel about following God then? Not just does he exist, but truly following Him, following Christ with all you have even when what He wants is the opposite of what you want? Where is our faith then? The evidence is still there, but for some reason it's not good enough anymore possibly because it's not fair.

The Israelites were in this spot in the book of Hebrews, by this time Christ had come and a large number of Israelites had accepted him as the Messiah but the situation had changed and honestly it wasn't fair. They were under immense persecution, they had given all they had to God and still lost their house, their families, in fact they had lost almost everything except Jesus at this point. And it wasn't fair, what was worse is that it looks like that this was what God intended for them. So they had enough and pretty much said, "You know what we want to go back to the way things used to be." Before there was Jesus, before there was persecution, before things weren't fair. So what the writer of Hebrews does is that he gently comes along side of them as they wrestle with their faith and he begins to remind them of the evidence and explains to them the point of what they are going through. We talked about that some last week with the whole discipline thing, remember we read...

...you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ^{Heb 12:6} because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." ^{Heb 12:7} Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? ^{Heb 12:8} If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. ^{Heb 12:11} No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

But if we back up a few chapters we see that the Israelites are not only wrestling with God himself, but also with their faith in Him. Let's look at Heb. 10:19-23

Heb 10:19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ^{Heb 10:20} by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ^{Heb 10:21} and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ^{Heb 10:22} let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ^{Heb 10:23} Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

God reminds the Israelites of the evidence to follow God and that the biggest supporting evidence is Jesus Himself, He tells them what they should do with the evidence and why. "Draw near to God with a sincere heart and full assurance of faith". The evidence tells us to draw near to God, draw near, pull closer not push away with full assurance of faith. Full assurance, let me ask you this, when things don't go your way is your tendency to draw near to God with complete confidence that he is going to do what He said? That's what the evidence points to. When things don't go the way we think they should, when life is unfair are we drawing near to God with sincerity, believing that what we said he will do? Vs. 23, "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful". Most of us profess this face on a regular basis, even if it's only twice a week in this environment, but do we hold to it. In other words, scripture says that He is faithful, but are we? Let's skip down a few passages and read what it says in verse 32

Heb 10:32 Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. ^{Heb 10:33} Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. ^{Heb 10:34} You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. ^{Heb 10:35} So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. ^{Heb 10:36} You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. ^{Heb 10:37} For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. ^{Heb 10:38} But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." ^{Heb 10:39} But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

Do you remember when you first came to know Christ, gave your life to Him? Maybe there was a sense of peace, or a feeling of a weight lifted off of you. Maybe you finally knew for sure you were free and you wanted everyone to know. Maybe you've never given your life to Christ and asked Him to save you, to take your place on the cross and decide to live for Him. Let's take a minute....

God's encouraging the Israelites to take a look back and remember what it was like, the emotions, the circumstances, their own attitudes. He says remember, and don't throw it all away just because it's not going your way. You see God's coming back to get his kids and he'll know who are his, they'll be producing righteousness and peace. And you know what else, they won't shrink back, they'll continue to believe and hold to their faith.

So what are your thoughts? When things don't go your way, when life isn't fair and God wants it that way, how's your faith? Do you still believe God will do what He says he will, that he is still faithful or do you tend to walk away and shrink back, who win's the wrestling match between your faith and the faith God calls you to have in Himself and the evidence he provides for it.

Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. Look through Heb. 11 and if possible check out some of the background passages to the hero's of the faith. How does their story present evidence for God's promises?
2. Which one of those people, remember they are real people and not characters in a story, do you and/or your students most identify with.
3. How do you feel about God not always treating us fair, think about where you would be if you got everything you deserve and there was no grace.
4. What are some proofs that you know of or have that God is faithful and will keep his word, try to be as personal and transparent with your students as you can (keep in mind it may hurt).
5. Do you tend to back away from God when things don't go your way, why? What can you do about it?