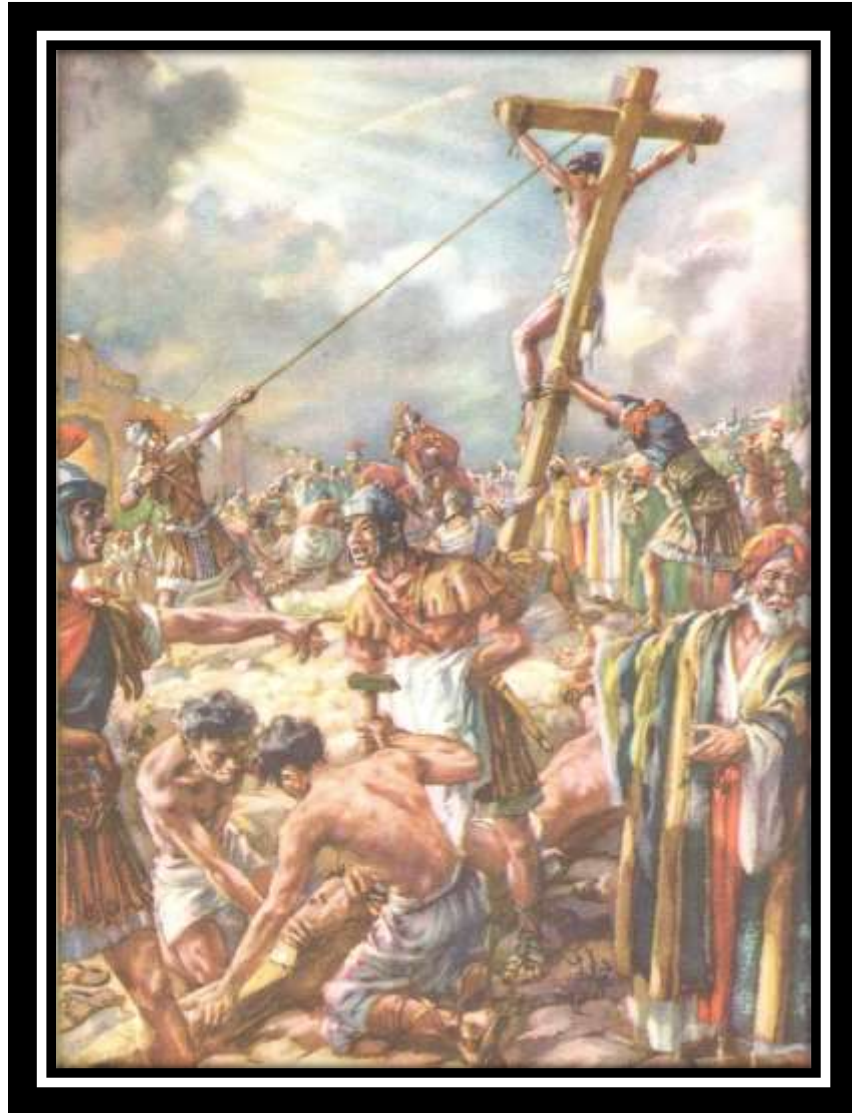


# FAITH IN WHAT? — WEEK 2

FAITH IS BEING SURE



F. Michael Slay  
*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

## *Faith in What, Week 2 — Faith is Being Sure*

The first Christians were sure that Jesus rose from the dead because they either saw it, or knew someone who did, or knew someone who knew someone who did. This gave them the kind of faith that can move mountains, or steel them for martyrdom. We live 2,000 years later. Getting that level of faith isn't easy.

But their martyrdom is key to proving that the resurrection happened, because it proves their sincerity. We'll have to go through a lot of steps to prove the rest.

---

We're pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. To subscribe to the daily DEEP email, visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) and click the sign-up button at the bottom.

There, you will also discover many other resources, including many email newsletters, such as our worldview study *ReVision*, our devotional newsletter *Crosfigell*, and *the DEEP*.

We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

T. M. Moore, Principal  
[tmmoore@ailbe.org](mailto:tmmoore@ailbe.org)

Thank you.

All the individual weekly study guides are available for download here:

<https://www.ailbe.org/resources/itemlist/category/91-deep-studies>

Faith in What, Week 2 — Faith is Being Sure

Copyright 2020 F. Michael Slay

The Fellowship of Ailbe

[www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org)

*All scripture references are noted. ESV stands for the English Standard Version. © Copyright 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved. NKJV stands for the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. NIV stands for The Holy Bible, New International Version®. © Copyright 1973 by International Bible Society. Used by permission. All rights reserved. KJV stands for the King James Version.*

1 Hebrews 11:1–2 (NIV)

*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.*

This verse explains Matthew 17:20.

*He replied, “Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”* (NIV)

A little bit of certainty can move mountains.

That’s what the first Christians had. They knew who Jesus was because of the fresh facts of His life, death, and resurrection. And boy did they move mountains. By 100AD there were a million Christians. As Tertullian would later write to Caesar, “*We are but of yesterday, and yet we have filled all the places that belong to you — cities, islands, forts, towns, exchanges; the military camps themselves, tribes, town councils, the palace, the senate, the market-place; we have left you nothing but your temples.*”

<https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/staff/gyaccp/geography%20and%20religion.pdf>

[http://www.tertullian.org/articles/irenaeus\\_philopolis.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/articles/irenaeus_philopolis.htm)

The ancients of Hebrews 11:2 deserve to be commended for their faith. They didn’t have the benefit of being close to the incarnation.

*Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* – John 20:29 (NIV)

We might be similarly commended, as we’re far away too. We want to be sure. Solid faith is exciting. Life without it is anything but.

*“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher.*

*“Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”* — Ecclesiastes 1:2 (NIV)

---

In studying mathematics, you grind through a lot of proofs. Later, even if the details of a proof are forgotten, you remember that you proved it. Just for kicks, you might revisit a particularly interesting proof (such as Euler’s outrageous proof that the sum of  $1/n^2$  is  $\pi^2/6$ ), but you don’t need to. You know in your heart that the theorem or formula is true, and you can use it confidently.

This series will be a bit like that. It will grind through how we can know that Jesus rose from the dead. It won’t have the exact structure of a mathematical proof, but it’ll cover all the bases. Our goal is to prove it, as they say it in court, “beyond a reasonable doubt.”

This should do more than just satisfy your curiosity. It can give you faith that moves mountains.

2 Mark 9:20–27 (ESV)

*And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” And Jesus said to him, “If you can! All things are possible for one who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, “He is dead.” But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.*

Needless to say, after Jesus cast out the demon, the father’s unbelief was “helped.” Seeing the supernatural jumps your belief in the supernatural. Jesus granted the father’s request perfectly. If faith is being sure, this guy now has faith.

But, faith in what? What’s he sure of? He’s obviously sure that Jesus can cast out demons. Is that it?

He must have heard of Jesus and of His reputation; that’s why he came to Him. He believed something about Jesus, maybe even that He’s the Messiah. His casting out the demon sealed that. “It’s all true!”

This passage is the perfect example of one of the ways faith can be strengthened—personal experience of the presence of God.

---

If you want to experience the presence of God (and who doesn’t?) the key is prayer. Prayer, especially prayer that seeks His will, is a lens through which you can see God. Without prayer, things just happen. With prayer, things happen for a reason. Just imagine if Gideon hadn’t prayed for God’s guidance.

*Then Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said, behold, I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said.” And it was so. When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water. Then Gideon said to God, “Let not your anger burn against me; let me speak just once more. Please let me test just once more with the fleece. Please let it be dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground let there be dew.” And God did so that night; and it was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew. — Judges 6:36–40 (ESV)*

Without his prayers, Gideon would have just thought the unusual dew patterns were strange. Instead, they were profound, faith building insights.

Gideon’s “lens prayer” made all the difference.

3 Acts 1:8 (ESV)

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

The Greek word that’s translated as “witnesses” here is “martures”—martyrs. That’s important.

The first Christians lived and died in poverty and torture without recanting. They weren’t just witnesses to the people of their generation; they were witnesses to us. Their martyrdom is the key to establishing the historicity of Jesus’s resurrection. They saw it. They testified to it. They died for it.

And you don’t learn about the Christians in the Coliseum with lions in Sunday School; you learn it in High School. Most of the evidence of Christian martyrdom isn’t in the Bible; it’s in the history books. Christians were persecuted mercilessly. Their refusal to recant, even under pain of death, certifies their sincerity. This wasn’t a game to them. It wasn’t a money-making scam. It wasn’t a quaint philosophy.

It was faith. The first Christians were persecuted for their faith, and their faith rested on the resurrection.

*And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. — 1 Corinthians 15:14–19 (ESV)*

If Jesus isn’t raised, then all the sacrifice, all the persecution, all the suffering, is for naught. Everything is just one big waste. That is, indeed, most pitiful. We’re the world’s biggest suckers.

When the first Christians confessed Jesus as Lord, and refused to bow down to Caesar as God, they were testifying that they were (to use the military analogy) “willing to die on this hill.”

They knew something and they wouldn’t back down, no matter the cost.

---

Experiencing the presence of God and studying the historicity of the resurrection aren’t alternative strategies for strengthening your faith. They’re complementary. Knowing that you have ground through the evidence that Jesus rose from the dead sets a baseline below which you cannot fall. In your darkest hour, when your faith is failing and you are doubting everything you thought you knew, you’ll still have that.

Conversely, each experience of the presence of God takes your faith to a new and higher level. You may not have seen what the first Christians saw but you saw something, and you know what that was. Eventually your faith becomes so robust that it cannot fall all the way back to the baseline.

More on this in the next devotional.

## 4 Acts 17:22–23

*Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription:*

### *TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.*

*Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:*

Faith can be divided into three levels—none, faith in something, faith in Christ. Many non-Christians would say that they don’t believe that Christianity is true, but they believe that something is true. They’re convinced that the universe isn’t random; something else is going on. They’re just not sure what. These people can be ripe for the harvest. Our job is to show that the something is the Trinity.

These are the kind of people Paul preached to in Acts 17. His sermon begins on their terms. He just talks about their faith in something until verse 31. But even with all this excellent lead in, the crowd reaction to his mention of the resurrection is predictably closed minded. Some even mocked him. So Paul left.

*However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them. — Acts 17:34 (NKJV)*

It’s good to start on someone’s own familiar ground. For the men of Athens, that was the inscription on their altar. For 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans it can be almost anything. You need to listen to them for a while to find out why they believe that something is true. Start from there.

I often use science. This Steven Hawking quote from *A Brief History of Time* indicates something is true.

*The laws of Science, as we know them at present, contain many fundamental numbers, like the size of the electric charge of the electron and the ratio of the masses of the proton and the electron. ... The remarkable fact is that the values of these numbers seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life. ... One can take this either as evidence of a divine purpose in Creation and the choice of the laws of science or as support for the strong anthropic principle.*

I just love his use of the word, “adjusted.”

---

The belief that something is true is an underappreciated part of our belief that Christianity is true. When our faith is strengthened by an experience of the presence of God, it’s the underlying belief that something is true that’s strengthened. We’ve already figured out that the something is Christianity.

When anyone senses God’s presence, or sees His hand in things, they’re sensing that something is true. This can make them very ripe for the harvest. They may be wondering, “What just happened?”

We know the answer.

5 Matthew 5:11–12 (NKJV)

*Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Jesus warned His disciples that persecution is coming. It didn't take long to arrive either.

*And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. — Acts 7:59–60 (NKJV)*

The New Testament clearly points to the truth of the Christian claims, but to prove the resurrection beyond reasonable doubt, we can't just assume that the Bible is true. That's what we're trying to prove.

We'll have to use all kinds of references. For example, Josephus records the martyrdom of James in Antiquities XX 9:1 (200).

*Festus was now dead, and Albinus was put upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedron of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when they had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned;*

Here we see, as with the stoning of Stephen, Jewish persecution of Christians. But that was small potatoes compared to the Roman persecution. The Romans, especially Nero, were brutal, even sadistic in their persecution and suppression of Christianity.

<http://romechristianity.weebly.com/the-spread-of-christianity.html>

Nero's suppression of Christianity backfired. It certified the very faith he sought to destroy. Without sadistic monsters like Nero, the proof that Jesus rose from the dead would be incomplete. We need the persecution to establish the sincerity of the first Christians. That's step one of the proof.

It's one thing to say something casually; it's quite another to insist on something at the point of a sword.

The first Christians weren't kidding around.

---

The persecution that the first Christians endured proves that they were sincere in their belief that Jesus rose from the dead. Thus, proving that Jesus rose means proving that they weren't wrong, fooled, or mistaken. To do this we'll need to walk through every hypothesis for how the resurrection might not actually have happened.

There's an interesting twist to this. Jesus gave His life to save sinners. The first sinners He saved gave their lives so that other sinners, like us, could know for sure that Jesus gave His life to save sinners.





Ref 1 See page 15 here

<https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/staff/gyaccp/geography%20and%20religion.pdf>