

Isn't Faith Irrational?

Luke 9:28-36

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Every week it seems that there is something new in our world to digest with the Coronavirus, wild stock market swings, social distancing, and people being quarantined.

In many cases, all we need is a little rational thinking, a little more common sense.

What we don't need are people trying to take advantage of people's fears.

Last week the New York Attorney General ordered televangelist Jim Bakker to stop promoting an alleged Coronavirus cure by selling a product called "Silver Solution."

Most rational people would know that such a product was a fake, but why would a preacher be selling a product and falsely claiming it would do something that it could not do?

There have always been those people claiming to be who they were not and claiming to do what they could not do. Was Jesus one of those people?

By the ninth chapter of Luke's gospel, the physician informs us that the ministry of Jesus was in full swing. He had trained his disciples and sent them out with power to drive out demons and to cure diseases.

He sent them out to preach about the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He sent them out with instructions to take no staff, no bag, no food, no money, or an extra tunic. They carried light loads and heavy hearts, heavy for the people whom they desired to bring into the kingdom of God.

A buzz had developed around Jerusalem because of the work done by Jesus and his disciples. Herod, the tetrarch thought he had put an end to the Kingdom of God movement, with the beheading of John the Baptist.

Some people were saying that John had been raised from the dead. Others were saying that Elijah had reappeared, and some believed that a prophet from long ago had come back to life.

They were all referring to the ministry of Jesus.

All were interesting answers, but none of them sound very rational, do they?

But what's rational about a man and his disciples healing people of diseases and driving out demons?

What's rational about a man taking a few loaves of bread and a few fish and feeding a multitude?

I challenge you to read the ninth chapter of Luke's gospel and show me much in it that's rational.

Some faith is rational. I have faith that when I flip a switch on the wall as I go into a room, a light will come on.

I have faith that when put a key in my Ford F-150 and turn it, the engine will start.

I have faith that when I deposit my money in the bank, it will be safe, and they will even give me a measly amount of interest to leave it there.

These are rational examples of faith.

Is it rational to hope to encounter a supernatural God in our lives? Non-believers say, "No."

Is it rational to have faith that when we die that we will undergo a transformation where God gives us a new body, a spiritual body that cannot be touched by decay or disease?

It is rational to believe that the prayers of one person or the prayers of a few can move God to act and change the world around us?

The faith Jesus introduced his disciples to was an irrational faith. That's right. It was not rational.

That's why Jesus sent out the twelve with no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, and no extra tunic.

Who goes on a journey like that? That's not rational. That's what made it an exercise of faith. It wasn't rational to make a trip without these items. As they went, they were to carry their faith with them. That's all. Just their faith.

Chapter nine records that because of the healings Jesus performed, the crowds around him grew.

Late in the afternoon, the disciples told Jesus he needed to send the crowds away so they could go to the surrounding villages and find something to eat. That's rational.

There were thousands of people present, and Jesus said, "You give them something to eat." (v. 13) That's not rational.

Does God ever ask you or us as a church to do irrational things?

When the disciples responded that all they had were five loaves of bread and two fish, Jesus told the disciples to seat people in groups of fifty.

No doubt each disciple mumbled something under his breath that such a request was irrational. Something like, "This is stupid," might have been said.

Yet they obeyed and were astonished when Jesus fed more than five thousand people with the five barley loaves and two fish. They collected twelve basketfuls of leftover food. That's not rational, but if it were rational, it wouldn't be a miracle.

If everything God asks us to do were rational, then nothing he asks us to do would require faith.

When God told Israel to move into the Promised Land, a group went over there and came back and said, "That's not rational. The people over there are too big and powerful and the cities are too well fortified."

There are times when God tells you as an individual and us as a church to go in a certain direction and there always seems to be those that say, "We can't do that. That's not rational."

At the center of this chapter and the center of Luke's gospel, we find Jesus praying in private. His disciples were with him, and he stopped praying to ask them whom the people thought he was.

All of the answers they gave him were irrational: John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets. Why? Because all of these people were dead.

Jesus then asked a very rational question. "Who do you say that I am?"

As you may know, Peter gave a faith answer. Some say his response was also irrational. Peter answered, "You are the Christ of God."

Jesus told them not to tell anyone, which sounds irrational. After all, isn't that what he wanted everyone to know and believe. What was the problem?

The disciple's understanding of a Messiah was a rational one. They were looking for a military liberator, someone who could rally the people under a common cause and rightfully restore Israel to her glory days as in the days of King David.

But Jesus didn't want his disciples telling people he was the Messiah because this is the image the people would draw in their minds. The rational image of Jesus wasn't the correct one.

No sooner had Peter made his great confession, "You are the Christ of God," Jesus set out to define his purpose upon this earth, a most irrational one by our standards.

He said to the disciples, "The Son of Man will suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." (9:22)

There isn't one rational word in this statement by Jesus.

Try to hear this as the disciples heard it. To the disciples, it was an absurd thought that the Messiah, the one God sent, would suffer and be killed.

How could the Son of God be killed if he had the power to heal, cast out demons, feed multitudes, and empower others? How could such a person ever succumb to a death reserved for the vilest of criminals?

If that person died, how could he liberate Israel?

I doubt they even comprehended or heard him say that he would be raised on the third day.

I know the disciples heard Jesus. I know they listened to Jesus. But I don't think they had faith in Jesus, not the kind of faith Jesus wanted them to have, not at this point in their lives.

No doubt, this discussion with Jesus was still fresh on their minds the day Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him up on a mountain to pray.

Since we are discussing irrational things, let's think a moment about prayer. What do you believe about prayer?

Prayer to a nonbeliever is an irrational exercise, a waste of time. But to a believer, prayer is an exercise of faith.

When we pray, are speaking words to ourselves, or are we speaking words to the God of the universe?

When we pray, are we listening for a word from a God who doesn't exist or are we listening for a word from a God who knows our address, a God who knows the number of hairs on our heads?

Twice in this chapter, Luke records that Jesus pulled away from the crowds to spend time in prayer.

Twice in this chapter, Jesus met with his disciples and discussed issues related to his prayers.

If Jesus needed to pull away to pray, perhaps we need to redefine the meaning of irrational.

It's irrational to think we can push through the day and week without talking and listening to God.

It's irrational to believe that we can always work out our problems on our own without the help of God.

If we believe in God, and we believe God answers prayers, and yet we do not pray, what's rational about that?

Were you listening close enough to the text to know what was on Jesus' heart as he climbed the mountain with Peter, James, and John?

He went to the mountain to pray. He took his three closest disciples with him as support. What was weighing so heavily on Jesus? It's very subtle. It gets lost in the theatrics of that mountain top experience.

Look at the latter part of verse 31. Referring to Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, the verse says, "They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem."

In this most irrational of scenes, Jesus is portrayed as the fulfillment of the law and the prophets, represented by the presence of Moses and Elijah. Jesus speaks to these ancient biblical legends about one the most irrational aspects of the Christian faith, his own departure, his death.

How was Jesus going to depart this world? He was going to depart through the same door we will all leave it – by way of death. There's nothing irrational about that, except Jesus was the Son of God. How could the Son of God die the death of a criminal?

Many believed that Jesus' death only confirmed that there was nothing special about him. It appeared he was just a man, a charismatic man, but only a man.

But just three days later, the most irrational thing to ever occur is recorded by all four Gospels: Jesus was raised from the dead.

As we prepare for Easter during this season of Lent, I remind you that Easter is the most irrational concept of Christianity.

Jesus' resurrection and his ascension into heaven are the points where many people abandon the Christian faith. These two events seem too irrational for many people to believe. It's at this point that many people cannot bring themselves to accept our faith.

But real faith was never meant to be rational. If it were rational, it wouldn't be faith.

Faith was meant to be filled with mystery and trust. Faith was meant to be exercised within a support group of friends and fellow believers.

Faith was meant to be patterned after the life of Jesus.

Faith was never meant to be totally embraced without evidence. We have plenty of evidence of the presence of God through the person of Jesus Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Of the Holy Spirit, Paul says that "He is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession." Eph. 1:13 (NIV)

The Bible teaches that those of us who believe in Jesus as the Son of God will one day live with God in heaven. We will be transformed.

Our physical bodies will give way to a new one, which will not be subject to sickness or pain. Eternity will be before us, and nothing will ever threaten us or take away our joy. That sounds irrational to some people, but to the believer, it is a matter of faith.

To the believer, what is irrational is that we are here on this earth by accident; that life began without a great Cause Agent; that we are free to live our lives without any accountability to a greater good; that we live and we die, and we are no more.

To the believer, these beliefs are irrational. To the believer, an irrational faith is a faith that places emphasis on the temporal, on individual accomplishments, on luck, on financial assets, on pleasure, on religion, on anything other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

If the world wants to claim that our faith in Jesus Christ irrational, so be it.

If Christians are wrong and others are right, we've not lost anything now or in eternity. But if Christians are right and others are wrong, then nonbelievers have lost it all. That seems very rational.

Once you embrace the Lord, nothing will ever seem more real.

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