

There was a brief period of time when I was in elementary school that I wanted to be a professional football player. When I explained to one of my teachers that I did not need to know how to use punctuation, because I was going to be a professional football player, she said something about me needing to live in the real world. That was good advice for me in that particular situation.

Sometimes people tell us that we need to live in the real world, and we might do well to question what is the real world. Imagine the reaction of the people of Israel when they first received the commandment not to do any work on the Sabbath. Who would take care of the fields and the flocks on the Sabbath? Who would keep the world running if everyone took a whole day off each week? A whole day of rest sounds good in theory, but we have to live in the real world. I think that's how at least some of the people reacted, because that's how many people in our society react.

How do you think people reacted to Jesus when he said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth?" Are you kidding? How can the meek inherit the earth? If you don't assert your rights, the rest of the world is going to run over you. We have to live in the real world.

What is the real world? Do practicing the principles of the Sabbath, and meekness reflect the real world? Or are these principles out of touch with the real world?

Our reading from the Letter to the Hebrews today tells us that faith is the evidence of things hoped for, the substance of things not seen. Faith is more than a belief that God exists. Faith tells us that God is there, and that He rewards those who seek Him. Faith tells us that God ordered all of creation through His Word. Faith leads us to look for a better country that the people of this world cannot see. Faith allows us to see the real world. Faith gives us the foundation to order our lives around things that are not seen, but are real, more real, than the things that are seen.

The Letter to the Hebrews gives several examples of faith in action. Let's focus on two of those examples. First, there is the example of Noah. In Genesis, we read that the earth had become entirely corrupt. Human society had become full of violence, and the hearts of humanity were focused on evil all the time.

What kind of view of the real world do you think people in Noah's time had? It was a view that inspired them to take what they wanted. In their world, concern for others was not a factor in making decisions. Any thought for the Lord had perished from their minds.

Although, it is not stated explicitly, it is implied that Noah rejected the idea that the people around him were living in the real world. The Lord told Noah to build an ark so he and his family, and the animals of the earth could be saved, so, Noah set to work building an ark. It took Noah years, even decades to build the ark. Imagine, for decades, Noah was building a boat on dry land. I'm sure more than a few people had something to say about Noah's project.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews tells us that Noah condemned the world by his faith. Because Noah believed in the ways of the Lord instead of the ways that the people around him

were living, Noah was saved through faith. Because Noah believed that the Lord would save him, he acted on the Lord's instructions and built the ark.

Sometimes faith causes us to reject the ways of the world around us. It gives us the assurance that what the Lord says about life is the real world, and the people around us are living in unreality.

The second example I would like to look at is the example of Abraham. The Letter to the Hebrews says, "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out not knowing where he was going."

All that the Lord said to Abraham was, "Get up and take your household to the land that I will show you." If the Lord told me to take my family to Hawaii, I think I could get on board with that, especially if it was January or February. If the Lord said, "Set out toward the west. I'll let you know where you're going when you get there," that would be a little more difficult. What if He stopped me halfway across Nebraska and said, "You've arrived." We just drove across Nebraska a couple weeks ago, and the middle of Nebraska is not a place I would really want to live. I'm fairly certain that Lisa and the children would not be too happy either.

How could Abraham obey such a command? Abraham must have believed that the Lord had something better for him than the place he was living. He did not know about the place he was going, but Abraham believed in the Lord. He believed that the Lord had something better for him than where he was.

Our faith will always lead us to embrace a world that has yet to come. When we became Christians, the Lord called us to leave behind the ways of this world, and live in a way that is consistent with the new heaven and new earth that He has promised to bring to us.

Our faith, then, is not simply a belief that God is there. It is the assurance that the God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ is good, and desires good for us. It is the conviction that the God who created the universe has revealed His true design for creation both in the words of scripture and the Word made flesh, Jesus His Son. It is a belief that produces hope, and causes us to act with hope for a better world, a world that is in line with the Lord's design.

So, where is your faith challenging you to reject the unreality of the world that is seen? Perhaps your challenge is to reject consumerism. We're told over and over that if we just have the right house, or the right car, or the right style, or the right bit of technology, our life will be full. The Lord says if we seek Him, we will be rewarded. If we hunger and thirst for righteousness we will be filled.

Perhaps your challenge is to reject secularism. We are told that the church and the world are two separate realms, and that the rules that apply on Sunday don't apply on Monday. We are told that worshipping as we please is one thing, but practicing our faith outside of these walls is quite another. The reality is that the Lord who is with us on Sunday is also with us on Monday.

Perhaps faith is challenging you to reject malice and anger. We live in a world that admires the person with the sharp wit who can destroy someone with 140 characters in a tweet. We live in a world that tells us it's fun to ridicule those with whom we disagree. We live in a world that tells us it's good to win, but it's great to crush the opposition. Faith tells us that such malice and anger will lead to our own destruction.

Where is your faith challenging you to embrace a better world? Perhaps faith is challenging you to live more generously and compassionately. You've seen a need that you can fill, and it's like the Lord is saying, "I've put you here to meet that need."

Maybe faith is challenging you to see the world as a place that is full of God's grace. Maybe when you ask for God's blessing on your meal, your faith is challenging you to stop and think that the food we have truly is a sign of God's blessing. Or, maybe your faith is challenging you to see that the resources you have have been entrusted to you so you can serve the Lord with them.

Perhaps your faith is challenging you to extend forgiveness to someone who has hurt you. Maybe you are coming to the place where you know you need to forgive as you have been forgiven.

Where is faith leading you to live in the real world rather than the unreality of our society? These are ways that faith in the God who is there will shape our lives, because when we have a living faith, we will understand that the Lord ordered the universe according to His word, and He rewards those who seek him.