

HOW DO YOU INCREASE YOUR FAITH?

Luke 17:5-10, Text vs. 5 The apostles said to the Lord, *"Increase our faith!"*

The apostles said to the Lord, *"Increase our faith!"* The Lord replied, *"If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."* But at the end of what the apostles asked Jesus there's an exclamation mark, which suggests, the disciples weren't just *asking* for an increase in their faith. They *wanted* it. And Jesus response began with just one little word, "IF."

Have you heard of the Prosperity Gospel? It's defined as faith, wealth, and health. Advocates of the Prosperity Gospel believe faith is how effective it is. *"Faith is faith, only if it works."* If you pray hard enough, if you do everything God expects of you, then you'll get what you want! And if you don't get what you want, it's your fault. You don't have enough faith to appreciate what you do have.. During a tornado, a mother was crying for help after her son was sucked up by the tornado and blown away. She turned to heaven and shouted: *"Please, Lord, please bring back my son! He's all I have. I'll do anything to get him back."* Suddenly, her son fell out the sky. Right at her feet. He was a little shaken. But he was safe. The mother embraced her son. And as she did, she noticed something was missing. She glared back up at the heavens and said, "Lord, he had a hat!"

The apostles said, *"Increase our faith!"* How does that happen? The disciples were a lot like us. If they could just have more faith, they could be better disciples. Think about that! Look at your own life. Are you pleased with how you are? Everyone has a sense they could be doing better and say, *"If only I had more faith, then I could be a better Christian."* Well, you could say to God what the disciples said, *"Increase my faith!"* But before we look at how Jesus answered that, let's get the background on this passage. Verses 1 through 10 seem disconnected. They appear to be a bunch of sayings just thrown together. Seeds. Trees. Servants. That may be how Luke put these verses together from various sayings of Jesus. Maybe Jesus didn't even say them all at once. It doesn't matter. The fact is, the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to record them this way. So, there must be meaning to the order.

Last week we learned in Luke's account about Jesus telling the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man. What did we learn? We need to be winners! And here, in verse 1 of chapter 17, Jesus continued talking about the responsibility of being a disciple. He said the disciples were asking for the wrong thing. They didn't need to increase their faith. They needed to increase their *faithfulness*. There's a big difference! Faith is a gift from God. He gives you the amount of faith you need, and it never runs out. To ask God to increase your faith is an affront to Him. Faithfulness is how you respond to your faith he gave you. It's what you do with your faith that matters. It's up to you.

Faithfulness is defined as being loyal and obedient to the person in whom you put your trust. If you have put your faith in Jesus, you must be faithful to Him. Jesus needs to be both your Savior and your Lord. It's not enough to say, *"Thanks Jesus for dying for me. I'm outa' here!"* When you accept His Redemption, you die that very day! You're no longer who you were. You're different! At baptism, you're resurrected. You become a new person. You no longer live for yourself. Now, you live for Jesus! As a believer, you give your entire life over to Him saying, *"Here I am Lord. Use me as you wish."* When you do that, you're willing to be faithful. And when God says, *"Here's what I want you to do!"* you must be faithful and do it! So, it's not a matter of faith. It's a matter of *faithfulness*! That's why Jesus was talking about a mustard seed. It grows. And Faith grows! That's why He was talking about servants plowing fields and then coming in from the fields to serve their Master. When you're faithful to God, you aren't given a medal. You do good works for God. Not to increase your salvation. No! Faithfulness is part of your job description as a Christian. It's expected! Your faith is supposed to grow. A servant is expected to serve and be faithful. When you get the feeling, something's isn't right in your walk with God, it's not that you lack faith. You lack *faithfulness*!

Have you ever noticed Christian people who are spiritually mature are people being faithful to God. They're doing what God wants them to be doing. They're living their lives for Him. Not for themselves! They aren't concerned about themselves. Their concerned about other people. That's what this church must have. A place that's busy being faithful to God. Christ says, *"Whoever loses his life for my sake, will find it."* Have you lost your life for Jesus, yet? Losing your life for Jesus' means doing His will, instead of fulfilling your own desires. Losing your life for Jesus' sake means becoming less of yourself and more like Him. Losing your life for Jesus means losing your weak, pathetic, selfish, prideful, sinful self in order to become more like Him. Jesus said a great faith is when you realize you are not worthy of God's riches. Isaiah 66:2 has God saying, *"This is the one I approve: the one who is humble and contrite in spirit."* That's why humility is so necessary for a strong faith. When you are humble, you realize you need help.

Compare it to growing old. Some elderly people are very stubborn. They've taken care of themselves all their lives. And as long as they can still do it, they refuse to ask for help. It's not until their physical condition gets to the point where they can't help themselves any longer that they become humble and finally ask someone for help.

Jesus had begun a preaching tour of Galilee. In Capernaum a doctor had examined the son of a Roman centurion and reported he had done "all that could be done". One of the centurion's servants had heard about what Jesus had done at the Passover, and had just learned that Jesus was currently in Cana of Galilee only a day's journey away. Because the centurion had treated the Jews justly, even helping with the synagogue, the servant told the centurion about Jesus to save the boy's life. So, he sent the servant, and one of the leaders of the synagogue, to ask for help. In the late afternoon, the

servant and the leader of the synagogue arrived in Cana, and the leader spoke to Jesus on behalf of the centurion. Jesus agreed to travel to Capernaum the next day. But in Capernaum, the boy had taken a turn for the worse. The centurion believed that his son would not survive long enough for Jesus to walk that far, so, he got on his chariot and left for Cana to give Jesus a ride back to Capernaum. The two met on the road in the early afternoon. The centurion believed his son's time was very short. And he told Jesus not to bother coming all the way to Capernaum. Instead, *"just give a word of healing."* He thought, *"If Jesus is truly a healer from the Hebrew God, then He should be able to drive the killing spirit out of his son from where Jesus was."* Jesus was impressed that a non-Jew would believe in the power of the spoken "Word of God." So, and at about 1 pm, Jesus told the centurion his son would live. The centurion immediately returned to Capernaum alone and encountered some of his own servants on the road. They told him his son had suddenly gotten better. What impressed the centurion most was the report that his son's fever had broken "the day before" around the same time Jesus had told him his son would live. That Roman knew he was a helpless and unworthy sinner. He had no choice, but to trust in Jesus. He knew that he couldn't help his son himself. He needed help! And that's the good part of having faith. Don't trust in yourself or be arrogant. You have to trust someone else. And that's Jesus!

A small congregation in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains built a new sanctuary on a piece of land given them by a church member. Ten days before the new church was to open, the local building inspector told the pastor the parking lot was too small for the size of the building. Unless the church doubled the size of the parking lot, they could not use the new sanctuary. With its undersized lot, the church had used every inch of their land, except for the mountain which it backed up against. To build more parking spaces, they would have to move the mountain. Undiscouraged, the pastor announced Sunday morning he would meet that evening with all members who had *"mountain moving faith."* A prayer session would be held asking God to remove the mountain from the back of the church and provide enough money to have it paved and painted before the opening dedication service. At seven PM, 300 members assembled for prayer and prayed for nearly three hours. At ten PM the pastor said, "Amen. We'll open next Sunday as scheduled. God has never let us down before, and I believe he will be faithful this time, too." Monday morning, he was working in his study at home when a loud knock came at his front door. He called "Come in." A rough looking construction man appeared, removed his hard hat and said, "Excuse me, Reverend. I'm from Acme Construction Company over in the next county. We're building a huge shopping mall there. We need some fill dirt. Would you be willing to sell us a chunk of that mountain behind the church? We'll pay you for the dirt we remove. And we'll pave all the exposed area, free of charge, if we can have it right away. We can't do anything else until we get the dirt and allow it to settle properly." The church was dedicated the next Sunday, as originally planned! And there were more members with "mountain moving faith" on opening Sunday morning than there had been the previous week!

And both Matthew and Mark record Jesus saying that *faith the size of a mustard seed could move mountains*. Our Gospel today records Jesus saying, *"If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it will obey you.'"* Either way he chose to say it in the Gospels, the message was the same: *With just a little faith, great things can be done*. It's no wonder then the disciples said to him, *"Increase our faith."* Is it any wonder the pastor of that little mountain church called for those with *"mountain moving faith"* to come pray. Now, the point of Jesus' illustration doesn't support such conclusions. His point was the amount of faith you have doesn't matter. Lots of faith isn't necessary. Any faith at all, even a tiny little bit as small as a mustard seed, is enough. Enough for what? How about enough to move a human heart! AMEN