

LUKE 17:1-10

Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. ² It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble. ³ So watch yourselves. "If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them.

⁴ Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying 'I repent,' you must forgive them." ⁵ The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" ⁶ He replied, "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.

⁷ "Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? ⁸ Won't he rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? ⁹ Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

JESUS GIFTS US WITH MANY COMFORTING SAYINGS LIKE: "IN THE WORLD YOU WILL HAVE TROUBLE, BUT TAKE HEART I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD."

HE ALSO SAID: "REMEMBER I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, EVEN TO THE END OF THE AGE." AND THERE ARE MANY OTHER PROMISES JESUS MADE THAT ARE EQUALLY COMFORTING.

HOWEVER, THE SAVIOR ALSO SPOKE WORDS THAT CAN MAKE HIS FOLLOWERS FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE, AND AT TIMES ARE EVEN A LITTLE FRIGHTENING.

TODAYS READING FROM LUKE 17 OFFERS US SOME EXAMPLES OF THOSE TYPES OF SAYINGS.

HIS MESSAGE BEGINS COMFORTABLY ENOUGH WHEN HE SAID THAT IN THE WORLD ALL PEOPLE WILL STUMBLE FROM TIME TO TIME.

THIS IS KIND OF GOOD NEWS IN THE SENSE THAT JESUS DECLARES HE RECOGNIZES WE ARE ALL SINNERS.

WE MIGHT EVEN INTERPRET THIS TO MEAN THAT WHILE OUR SIN WILL DISAPPOINT AND EVEN ANGER GOD, IT WILL NOT SURPRISE GOD.

IMAGINE THE 12 DISCIPLES HEARING JESUS' STATEMENT NODDING THEIR HEADS IN AGREEMENT AS THEY AWAIT A WORD OF COMFORT OR HOPE FROM HIM, THEY ASSUME WILL FOLLOW.

BUT THEN HE SURPRISES AND DISTURBS THEM BY DECLARING WOE TO ANYONE WHO CAUSES SOMEONE ELSE TO STUMBLE, MEANING TO SIN.

JESUS SAID IT IS BETTER TO DIE THAN TO BE THE CAUSE OF ANOTHER'S TRANSGRESSION, ESPECIALLY SOMEONE MORE INNOCENT THAN WE ARE.

THOSE WORDS ARE FAR FROM COMFORTING BECAUSE WHO HAS NOT AT THE VERY LEAST SET A POOR EXAMPLE AND THUS LED ANOTHER, EVEN UNINTENTIONALLY, INTO SIN?

ALL OF US HAVE, AND UNFORTUNATELY MIGHT DO SO AGAIN. AND THAT IS NOT ALL JESUS SAID TO HIS DISCIPLES THAT WAS CHALLENGING.

NEXT, THE SAVIOR TOLD THEM TO FORGIVE EVERYONE WHO SINS AGAINST THEM AND REPENTS-NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES IT HAPPENS.

TRULY, THE SAVIOR'S WORDS CHALLENGE AND ENCOURAGE HIS DISCIPLES AND US TO DO SOME DIFFICULT THINGS.

WE ARE SUPPOSED TO NURTURE AN ATTITUDE THAT ADMITS OUR SINFULNESS, THE DANGERS OF CAUSING OTHERS TO SIN, AS WELL AS OUR NEED TO BE FORGIVEN AND TO FORGIVE.

IT IS NO WONDER THE DISCIPLES CRIED OUT TO THE LORD- "INCREASE OUR FAITH!"

YES INDEED, THEY KNEW THEY WERE POORLY EQUIPPED TO BE EITHER AS INNOCENT OF SIN THEMSELVES, OR AS FORGIVING OF ANOTHER'S SINS, AS JESUS DEMANDED.

THEIR PRAYER FOR MORE FAITH WAS A GOOD THING. IT SEEMS TO GIVE THEM CREDIT. FIRST, FOR RECOGNIZING THEIR OWN SHORTCOMINGS.

AND SECONDLY, FOR SEEKING THE LORD'S HELP TO FOLLOW HIM AND HIS COMMANDS.

WE WOULD EXPECT JESUS TO PROMISE HE WOULD GIVE HIS CLOSEST DISCIPLES ALL THE FAITH THEY ASKED FOR.

AFTERALL, FROM A HUMAN PERSPECTIVE IT IS A WORTHY REQUEST.

IT DEMONSTRATES A SINCERE DESIRE TO BE GOOD AND OBEDIENT FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST.

AND HOW DID JESUS RESPOND? HE DID SO IN A SURPRISING WAY.

HE DID NOT PROMISE TO PROVIDE THEM WITH MORE FAITH BEYOND WHAT THEY ALREADY POSSESSED.

IN ESSENCE, HE TOLD THEM "NO I WILL NOT INCREASE YOUR FAITH, BECAUSE YOU DO NOT NEED A GREATER AMOUNT THAN YOU ALREADY HAVE."

NOW, UNDER DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES, IT MIGHT BE ENCOURAGING TO HEAR ALL WE NEED IS BIT OF FAITH.

HOWEVER, IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PASSAGE IT IS UNLIKELY THE DISCIPLES FELT ENCOURAGED BY JESUS' RESPONSE.

THE SAVIOR REFUSED THEIR REQUEST TO BE GIVEN MORE FAITH IN ORDER TO FOLLOW HIM AND PLEASE GOD.

INSTEAD, JESUS TOLD THEM AND US, IT IS NOT A GREATER QUANTITY OF FAITH IN GOD THAT IS NEEDED, BUT RATHER THE QUALITY OF FAITH.

THIS QUALITY OF FAITH, ON ONE LEVEL, GROWS WHEN WE REMEMBER WITH GOD- NOTHING WITHIN HIS WILL IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD TO ACCOMPLISH.

THE OTHER WAY TO LOOK AT QUALITY OF FAITH AND ITS GROWTH, IS TO THINK OF FAITH AS BEING LIKE A MUSCLE.

THE WAY WE STRENGTHEN MUSCLES IS THROUGH DIET AND EXERCISE.

SIMILARLY, WE STRENGTHEN OUR FAITH THROUGH A DIET OF PRAYER, SCRIPTURE READING, AND WORSHIP.

THESE ARE THINGS WHICH HELP US TO KNOW GOD BETTER AND DRAW CLOSER TO THE LORD.

AND WE EXERCISE OUR FAITH BY USING IT, TRUSTING IN GOD, AS WELL AS BEING FAITHFUL TO GOD, INCLUDING IN OUR SERVICE TO HIM.

THEREFORE, THE PROBLEM THE DISCIPLES HAD, AND CHRISTIANS STILL HAVE, IS NOT TOO LITTLE FAITH BUT RATHER TOO LITTLE FOCUS ON GOD'S POWER AND WILL.

FAITH IN GOD IS THE KEY PART OF JESUS' RESPONSE TO HIS DISCIPLES' NEED. SUCH FAITH OPENS US UP TO GOD'S POWER.

IT IS GOD AS THE OBJECT OF OUR FAITH WE NEED TO LOOK TO AND NOT FAITH ITSELF.

REMEMBER, JESUS OFTEN SPOKE ABOUT COMING INTO THE WORLD TO SHOW US GOD THE FATHER AND HIS LOVE FOR THE WORLD.

FAITH IN GOD THEREFORE IS STRENGTHENED THROUGH OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD.

THEREFORE, IT IS GREATER TRUST IN GOD THAT WE REALLY NEED, INSTEAD OF MORE FAITH.

HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW KNOWING GOD BETTER CAN GIVE US MORE CONFIDENCE IN THE FAITH WE HAVE.

ONE WINTER A MAN WHO LIVED IN THE WISCONSIN WAS VISITED BY A FRIEND WHO LIVED IN FLORIDA. THEY BOTH LIKED TO FISH SO HE TOOK HIS FRIEND ICE FISHING.

THE MAN WHO KNEW THE ICE AND THE WINTER CONDITIONS BOLDLY WALKED OUT ON THE FROZEN LAKE AND CUT A HOLE IN THE ICE.

THE MAN FROM FLORIDA TOOK A FEW CAUTIOUS STEPS BUT HE DID NOT KNOW OR TRUST THE STRENGTH OF THE ICE, AND SO HE WAS FEARFUL TO GO FURTHER.

SIMILARLY, THE MORE WE KNOW AND TRUST GOD'S POWER, LOVE, AND WISDOM -THE FARTHER WE CAN GO BY FAITH.

ANOTHER WAY TO LOOK AT WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT ONLY NEEDING A MUSTARD SEED'S AMOUNT OF FAITH IS TO CONSIDER THE POTENTIAL WITHIN ALL SEEDS.

EVEN A TINY SEED HOLDS THE PROMISE AND POWER OF LIFE AND GROWTH.

SIMILARLY, IT IS NOT THE SIZE OF FAITH THAT IS IMPORTANT BUT THE POWER OF GOD WHO IS BOTH THE OBJECT AND SOURCE OF OUR FAITH THAT MATTERS MOST.

WHEN WE HAVE FAITH IN GOD, NO MATTER HOW SMALL IT MAY BE, WE OPEN OURSELVES UP TO GOD'S WORK WITHIN US, AND FOR THIS TO HAPPEN A TINY BIT OF FAITH IS ENOUGH.

THIS MEANS IT IS NOT OUR FAITH, BUT GOD, IN WHOM WE PUT OUR TRUST, THAT JESUS WANTS HIS FOLLOWERS TO FOCUS ON AND HAVE CONFIDENCE IN.

AFTERALL, IF WE KEEP LOOKING TO OURSELVES AND THE FAITH WE THINK WE HAVE OR NEED, WE WILL FAIL TO SEE WHAT GOD CAN DO FOR AND THROUGH US.

THIS FAITH IN GOD, HOWEVER SHOULD NOT BE SEEN AS A GUARANTEE THE LORD WILL SAY YES TO EVERY PRAYER OR NEED.

IN FACT, PART OF TRUSTING GOD INCLUDES CLINGING ONTO OUR SEED OF FAITH WHEN GOD DISAPPOINTS OR ANGERS US.

BUT JESUS HAD SOMETHING ELSE TO ADD CONCERNING THE DISCIPLES' NEED FOR MORE FAITH.

HE TOLD A PARABLE MEANT TO INSTRUCT THEM ABOUT HOW THEY CAN STRENGTHEN THE QUALITY OF THEIR FAITH.

AGAIN, THIS WAS NOT NECESSARILY THE HELP THEY WERE LOOKING FOR; HOWEVER, IT UNDOUBTEDLY WAS WHAT THEY NEEDED TO LEARN, AND WHAT WE NEED TO LEARN.

THE STORY RETURNS OUR ATTENTION TO THE THEME OF EXERCISING OUR FAITH.

THE STORY IS ABOUT A MAN WHO HAD A SERVANT. THE FAITHFUL SERVANT WORKED ALL DAY ON THE MAN'S LAND.

WHEN EVENING CAME THE SERVANT COULD NOT REST UNTIL HE HAD PREPARED FOR AND SERVED A MEAL TO HIS MASTER.

SO FAR THESE ACTIONS WOULD NOT BE UNEXPECTED, BUT JESUS ASKS HIS DISCIPLES: "DO YOU THANK THE SERVANT FOR DOING WHAT WAS COMMANDED?"

HE CONCLUDES HIS WORDS BY EMPHASIZING THAT AS SERVANTS OF GOD THEY SHOULD DO THEIR DUTY WITHOUT EXPECTING GOD'S THANKS.

ALSO IMPLIED IS THE FACT WE NEVER CAN GO BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY WITH GOD.

SO FIRST, JESUS TEACHES THAT GOD EXPECTS US TO EXERCISE OUR FAITH BY BEING FAITHFUL TO THE LORD THROUGH OUR ACTIONS AND OTHER SERVICE.

NEXT, WE ARE INSTRUCTED THAT OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS OUR DUTY SHOULD BE FREE OF THOUGHTS THAT WE ARE OR EVEN CAN EARN GOD'S FAVORS, BLESSINGS, OR THANKS.

NOW NOT BEING THANKED FOR OUR FAITHFUL SERVICE MAY SOUND HARSH, AND IT ALSO SHOWS POOR SOCIAL MANNERS.

AFTER ALL, MOST OF US HAVE BEEN TAUGHT AS YOUNG CHILDREN TO SAY "PLEASE" AND "THANK YOU."

SO WHY DOESN'T GOD THANK US WHEN WE ARE OBEDIENT? CONSIDER THIS: DOES THE TEACHER THANK THE STUDENTS FOR DOING THEIR HOMEWORK?

OR DOES A BOSS THANK WORKERS FOR COMING IN ON TIME AND COMPLETING THEIR REQUIRED TASKS?

FURTHERMORE, NEITHER STUDENTS NOR WORKERS REALLY EXPECT TO BE THANKED, AND ARE OFTEN SURPRISED IF THEY ARE THANKED FOR DOING THEIR DUTY.

IF WE LOOK TO THE GOSPEL STORIES- WE WILL FIND THAT JESUS NEVER THANKED HIS DISCIPLES FOR BELIEVING IN HIM OR OBEYING HIM.

AT TIMES HE SHOWED PLEASURE AND EVEN SURPRISE, AND HE AFFIRMED THEM WHEN THEY DID GOOD WORK.

BUT AS FAR AS I CAN RECALL, JESUS NEVER SAID THE WORDS: "THANK YOU FOR BEING OBEDIENT AND DOING YOUR DUTY."

THIS IS WHAT JESUS WANTED US TO LEARN ABOUT INCREASING THE QUALITY OF THE AMPLE FAITH WE ALREADY HAVE.

WE DO IT BY BEING OBEDIENT TO GOD, AND TRYING OUR BEST TO SERVE THE LORD, WITHOUT EXPECTING THANKS OR BLESSINGS.

THIS DOES NOT MEAN BLESSINGS WILL NOT COME, ONLY THAT WE DON'T EARN GOD'S GRATITUDE OR LOVE.

INSTEAD, WHILE GOD WILL DISCIPLINE IN ORDER TO CORRECT US, GOD'S NATURE IS NOT HARSH, BUT LOVING AND DESIRING TO BOTH FORGIVE AND TO BLESS.

FAITH IN GOD INVOLVES BOTH A RECOGNITION OF THIS, ALONG WITH OUR STRIVING TO BE FAITHFUL, EVEN WHEN IT IS HARD.

REMEMBER, GOD KNOWS US BETTER THAN WE KNOW OURSELVES, AND LOVES US UNCONDITIONALLY.

AND WHILE THE LORD CALLS US TO BE FAITHFUL TO HIM, HE ALSO KNOWS WE AT TIMES WILL STRUGGLE, ESPECIALLY WHEN WE THINK GOD HAS FAILED US.

THE LORD IS WILLING TO LISTEN TO ALL OF OUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS-OUR PRAISES, AS WELL AS OUR COMPLAINTS.

SHARING WITH GOD, EVEN THOSE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS WE DO NOT WANT ANYONE TO KNOW ABOUT, IS NOT A SIGN OF WEAK FAITH BUT IT IS ONE WAY WE EXERCISE OUR FAITH.

AS WE DO THIS, AS WE RUN THE RACE OF FAITH, LET US REMEMBER JESUS DOES MORE THAN JUST WAIT FOR US TO CROSS THE FINISH LINE.

HE ALSO, FULFILLS HIS PROMISE TO BE WITH US ALWAYS BY RUNNING THE RACE OF FAITH IN GOD ALONG SIDE US.

LET US THEREFORE CELEBRATE OUR FAITH AND GOD'S FAITHFULNESS BY PUTTING OUR TRUST IN GOD, AND DOING OUR BEST EACH DAY TO SERVE THE LORD. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: LUKE 17:1-10

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NEXT, THE SAVIOR TOLD THEM TO FORGIVE EVERYONE WHO SINS AGAINST THEM AND REPENTS-NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES IT HAPPENS. IT IS NO WONDER THE DISCIPLES CRIED OUT TO THE LORD- "INCREASE OUR FAITH!" AND HOW DID JESUS RESPOND? HE DID SO IN A SURPRISING WAY. HE TOLD THEM "NO I WILL NOT INCREASE YOUR FAITH, BECAUSE YOU DO NOT NEED A GREATER AMOUNT THAN YOU ALREADY HAVE."

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REMEMBER, ALSO, THE LORD IS WILLING TO LISTEN TO ALL OF OUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS-OUR PRAISES, AS WELL AS OUR COMPLAINTS. SHARING WITH GOD, EVEN THOSE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS WE DO NOT WANT ANYONE TO KNOW ABOUT, IS NOT A SIGN OF WEAK FAITH BUT IT IS ONE WAY WE EXERCISE OUR FAITH. AS WE DO THIS, AS WE RUN THE RACE OF FAITH, LET US REMEMBER JESUS DOES MORE THAN JUST WAIT FOR US TO CROSS THE FINISH LINE. HE ALSO, FULFILLS HIS PROMISE TO BE WITH US ALWAYS BY RUNNING THE RACE OF FAITH IN GOD ALONG SIDE US.

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