



Faith Enough
Luke 17:5-10

5 And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."

6 So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

7 "And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'?"

8 "But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'?"

9 "Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not.

10 "So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.' "

When a farmer wants to prepare an area for planting crops, he knows he has to do certain things before he can even begin to plow and plant seeds. First he is going to have to take out all the large stones that would damage his farm equipment or prevent the seeds from putting down roots. That will be difficult, but removing even large boulders is nothing compared to the difficulty of removing the trees.

Now why is that? I mean it's simple to cut down a tree, you get out the trusty chain saw, you cut the tree in the right places so it doesn't fall on your head, or your equipment, you yell "timber!" and boom the tree is down. Well that was the easy part, the hard part is the stump that's left in the ground, because that stump has roots that go deep into the ground, and you can't just pull it up. Either you use explosives to blow it out of the ground or you go through the tedious process of cutting it out. Recently we saw a huge old tree taken down just up the road as they were clearing an area for construction. My wife tells me that it took them days to get the root system up, and that with modern earth moving and construction equipment. Can you imagine how difficult it was to get a stump like that up in the days of the Apostles? Then you had no explosives and no machines, all the average farmer had to use was hand tools, maybe an ox-team if he was well off, and elbow-grease. Either way, it was no easy task.

Now I mention that, because it helps to explain why Jesus used the example of a mulberry tree here. You'll remember that just prior to these verses, Christ had been telling the Apostles about the vital importance of forgiveness, telling them that if someone sinned against them, and repented of that sin, they must forgive them – regardless of how many times it happened. The disciples heard that, and realized just how difficult what Jesus was asking them really was. ***In fact, if there is not a root of faith, the fruit of true forgiveness will not be found at all.*** The tendency of the natural man, is not to forgive when sinned against, in fact his tendency is to harbor a grudge and to seek to revenge himself. I myself remember in the school yard the saying was "**Don't get angry, get even.**" If you want an example of how ingrained the idea of revenge is to our culture, just look at our movies, one of your most basic recurring plot-lines is "Nice Guy is wronged by bad men at the start of the movie, and spends the rest of the movie getting even." Only wimps would ever forgive someone who had hurt them or theirs. And if you can bring yourself to forgive someone, how about forgiving them twice?

Ladies, imagine how hurt you would be if your spouse just entirely forgot your birthday. That might be something hard to forgive, wouldn't it? Now, imagine he forgot your birthday, *seven years in a row*. How easy would it be to forgive him say the fourth time he came to you to apologize.

What Jesus has said to the disciples is that anyone who sins against you, and then says he repents, must be forgiven. As the law of God taught in Leviticus 19:8

Lev. 19:18 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.'

No vengeance, no grudges, no constantly reminding them "they owe you" because of their offense. Just forgiveness free and full.

So the response of the disciples is a good one, "***Lord, increase our Faith!***" This is a hard thing you have asked, who can do it without great faith? And true it is that faith can and should be increased. As JC Ryle wrote: "***Faith is a grace which admits of degrees. It does not come to full strength and perfection as soon as it is planted in the heart by the Holy Spirit. There is "little" faith and "great" faith. There is "weak" faith and "strong" faith. Both are spoken of in the Scriptures. Both are to be seen in the experience of God's people. The more faith a Christian has the more happy, holy, and useful will he be. To promote the growth and progress of faith should be the daily prayer and endeavor of all who love life. When the apostles said, "increase our faith," they did well.***"

God indeed has provided us with the means of grace, Prayer, the preaching and reading of the word, and the sacraments that our faith might grow and be strengthened.

But here the answer of Christ is very encouraging because he doesn't say ***great faith*** is necessary in order to these things that He commands. What he tells them is necessary is ***genuine faith***. You who think your faith is very weak, who would call yourselves "Little Faith" if you were characters in Pilgrims progress, take heart!

Even the smallest faith, if it be true faith, is ***incredibly powerful***. That is because it is not something that you have created or drummed up, it is the work of the Holy Spirit in you. How powerful is it, well Jesus says that faith which is as small as a mustard seed is capable of uprooting a mulberry tree – a tree the Rabbis used to say would have roots that lasted 600 years in the ground – and casting it into the sea.

Even the smallest of genuine faith, if you will but prayerfully exercise it, is capable of uprooting even the deeply entrenched desire to revenge yourself or to hold a grudge. Here the quantity of faith is less important than the quality of it. Because it has its roots in the forgiveness of God extended to us, this faith will lead us to forgive others. As Thomas Watson put it: "***Believe God has pardoned you, and you will pardon others; only faith can throw dust upon injuries, and bury them in the grave of forgetfulness.***"

Andy McNabb tells a story about selection training for the SAS in one of his books, they were learning to clear trees in Malaya and he and his partner were working with plastic explosives for the first time. Now they had both been issued with a few pounds of the stuff, and the first tree they worked on was a massive banyan. They looked at the thing and they figured the more the better, so they just kept packing it onto the tree until they had used up most of it. When the time came to fire it off, there was this earsplitting massive explosion and instead of merely breaking the trunk of the tree, they sent it into orbit. Not surprisingly the

instructor wasn't very pleased. What did they do wrong? They'd massively underestimated the power of their explosives and overestimated the difficulty of the problem.

Christians make the same mistake about their faith all the time, when it comes to spiritual matters, we are too ready to believe the lies of the Devil and say ***I could never overcome that***. I could never forgive and forget, I could never be free of this or that addiction, I could never be a strong Christian husband. How many Christians still define themselves in terms of a particular sin for instance?

How few really believe Paul when he says: ***"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds"***(2 Cor. 10:2) Brothers and Sisters, believe this, if you are Christ's you have the power to stand in the evil day, to stand firm in the spiritual battle against the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. You have that within you that will enable you to uproot stubborn and prevailing sins and cast them into the depths of the sea and to overcome evil by good. This faith that is within every true Christian will enable them to do mighty things for God.

True Christians have the power to accomplish amazing things. But there's a danger in that, and the danger is spiritual pride. You do some good works and you begin to forget that as Paul said in Eph. 2:8-10 ***"by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."***

We begin to forget that all of our salvation, including even the good works we do, is by grace, and that when we do actually accomplish great things, and do good works, we are simply doing what we were created to do by God. That is why Christ tells the parable about the servant, or more properly *Doulos* slave. He reminds us that we do not put God in our debt when we do good works. Quite the opposite, when we do these good works we are only doing what we ought to do.

We do not add anything to God by doing good works, that is why Jesus reminds us that when we do these works we are still *unprofitable servants*. To profit is to increase, to add to, we do not add anything to God, in fact we need to be reminded that what we remember to do for God, no matter how great, is nothing compared to what we daily fail to do. As Matthew Poole put it: ***"...our performances are so lame and imperfect, that the greatest part of what we do amounts not to the least part of what we leave undone."***

Ok, so perhaps at this point you are thinking, well ok first Jesus encourages us about what our faith can accomplish, and then the next moment he wipes out all that by telling us that even if we could actually do ***everything*** we are supposed to, we would still be *unprofitable servants*. How is that not discouraging?

Because Christians, in that you see the great grace of the gospel. Yes in many things, and in many ways you daily fail to do all that your maker has commanded of you, and yet you will receive many rewards! God does not repay us strictly according to our works, He goes far, far, beyond that. {SPURGEON QUOTE} Praise God that the rewards we receive are not according to our imperfect works, but according to the perfect work of Jesus Christ! Even if you do have the littlest faith, that little faith still unites you to Christ! Your faith may be small, you may still be growing slowly in grace, but Christian your inheritance is just as full, your claim to heaven just as sure as the greatest saint who ever lived!

As Dabney put it: ***"as our faith strengthens, so will the strength of our apprehension of a justified state grow with it. The former also may, to some extent, be affected by the increase of our faith. God may make that increase the occasion of manifesting to the soul larger measures of favor and grace. But the soul is not one whit more God's accepted child then, than when it first believed. We have seen that the***

thing which, strictly speaking, is imputed, is the title to all the legal consequences of Christ's righteousness—i.e, title to pardon and everlasting adoption, with all the included graces. Now, the acknowledged and legitimate son of a king is a prince, though an infant. His status and inheritance are royal, and sure; though he be for a time under tutors and governors, and though he may gradually be put into possession of one and another, of his privileges, till his complete majority. So the gradual possession of the benefits of justification does not imply that our acquisition of the title is gradual."

1) Application One: Do we have *any faith*? Without it we are not even unprofitable servants - Heb. 11:6 *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. If you have not yet believed the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ then all of your attempts at working to please God are ultimately fruitless. No man will ever be justified in the eyes of God by "trying to live a good life."*

Gal 2:16 *"knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified."*

2) Application Two: Kids I used to love a cartoon called "Stop that Pigeon!" which starred Dick Dastardly and a dog named Mutley. They were all part of the Vulture Squadron and they would build these wildly impractical biplanes in an attempt to catch "Yankee Doodle Pigeon" who was delivering vital messages. Inevitably the pigeon got away and the planes would fall apart, and Dick Dastardly would be left hurtling towards the earth yelling *"Mutley, save me!"* Now Mutley worked for Dick Dastardly, but Mutley would never save Dick unless he gave him a medal. He had to get a big reward or he wouldn't do his duty. Now we can fall into the habit of expecting a big reward for just doing what we are supposed to. Now that's bad when we do it to our parents at home, like when we expect to get paid for doing chores. But its even worse when we do it to God. The Pharisees would never do anything for God unless people saw them and said "O how good you are!" and said all sorts of nice things about them. Many Christians won't serve other people unless they get a reward.

NKJ Matthew 6:1 *"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

2 "Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

3 "But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

4 "that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

5 " And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

6 "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Grow up thinking to yourself, *I don't want my rewards here on earth, I don't want the little fleeting things that people can give me. I want the Rewards of grace that only God can give, and I want them in heaven!*