

Luke 17:5-6; Heb. 11:1-3; Increasing our Faith I. The Heart of Faith II. The Request of Faith III. The Fruit of Faith
 Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, what is faith? Where does faith come from and how does it grow? Today
 Jesus brings us to important doctrine of true faith. We live in a world that talks a lot about faith. The phrase-
 “people of faith” has been used to describe anyone who is religious. But are all faiths equal? Does it make a
 difference who is the object of our faith- and what that faith hopes for? Our world tells us to believe in yourself.
 It is interesting that many music artist- from Cher to Brookes and Dunn; including Justin Bieber and Elton John-
 these all sang a song called- “Believe.” But what does it mean to believe? So today we find Jesus teaches his
 disciples about the need for and power of true faith.

I. The Heart of Faith

We start this morning by considering the object of faith. What is it and where does it come from? When the
 disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith- they were asking Jesus to build something- to strengthen something
 that they had in their hearts. Heb. 11 defines faith as the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of
 things not seen. True faith then, is not a blind leap or a baseless dependence on someone. No, true Christian
 faith is built upon the certainty of truth- it rests upon the promises of God- it is built on the solid foundation of
 reality. At issue is this- is Jesus who He said He is? Will He do what He said He will do? Will we receive what we
 have promised? True faith says- Yes- Jesus is faithful and dependable- His word is reliable and true. That is why
 scripture compares faith to a trusting, relying, resting, receiving and believing. Faith clings and holds on to the one
 who is faithful! Historically, we have seen that faith is made up of knowledge, assent and trust. A true, Christian
 faith has a content- we know something to be true. Faith also assents – drawing upon that knowledge and
 embracing and accepting it as true and dependable. And finally, true faith trust- taking action upon what is true
 and follows after the truthful one. To put this in an illustration, when you come to a bridge you have a choice. Do
 you know that this bridge is stable- does it look trustworthy? Do you have a knowledge about this bridge- is there
 evidence that it is reliable? Moving beyond the academic looks of this bridge, do you think it will hold you. What
 is your personal decision concerning this bridge? Will you trust it to hold your weight? Finally, it takes faith to

walk out upon that bridge and cross over it. Each aspect reveals a part of what we mean when we say that we have faith in Jesus Christ. Or as LD 7 puts it- true faith is not only a knowledge and conviction that everything God has revealed in His word is true, it is also a deep-seated assurance that not only others but I too have had my sins forgiven and that I have been made forever right with God. So the basis of our faith is the person and work of Jesus Christ. Or as we confess in the AC- I believe in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Where does this faith come from? This faith is produced in my heart by the Spirit- and the Spirit normally uses the Word to stir my heart to trust and depend on Jesus Christ for my salvation. This faith was evident in the hearts of the disciples- but they still felt that their faith was weak. At this point in their ministry, the disciples saw their own weakness and inability- as we saw last week in the opening verses of this chapter. Since we will all be tempted, the disciples ask Jesus- please increase our faith so that we do not fall!

II. The Request of Faith

So the disciples request in v. 5- increase our faith. The word used is “Prosethes”- meaning to add to, increase, to make mature or develop that faith. They are acknowledging that their faith is weak- that the temptations are so strong- that we need help. So Lord, dear master and owner of my body and soul- please increase our faith. Now we have to pause and ask- is this a good request? Was it right for the disciples to ask Jesus to increase their faith? Is this even possible- can a person’s faith be increased? II Peter 3:18 says- that we are to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Or as Jesus said Mt. 18- you can have childlike faith and mature faith- you can even be established in your faith as Col. 2 puts it. II Thes. 1:3 even states- your faith is growing abundantly. So it seems like faith is something that can grow up, becoming full and mature. However, did you note that Jesus did not answer this request as such. Instead of saying- do this to increase your faith. He did not give them a 3 step program to increased faith. Nor did He simply raising his hand and say- receive a strengthened faith. Rather, Jesus teaches them about the nature of faith- and were faith gets its strength! The request of these disciples is a right request made to the correct person. It is Jesus who gives and strengthens faith. And we know that Jesus is pleased to use His word and Spirit to increase our faith- to cause us to grow in that faith- so that we

become mature and steadfast. But what makes a strong faith? It is not the same thing taught by so many in our world. Strong faith- as taught by Health and Wealth preachers- means a faith that names and claims whatever you want! In their teaching, strong faith means that you will never get sick- strong faith means that you will have whatever you want- that you can speak to your car and turn it into a new one. That you can claim 1 million dollars- and by faith you will get it. That is the supposed strong faith taught by false teachers in our world. But what makes true, strong Christian faith is not what we do or claim- NO! Actually, our faith is strengthened when we go through trials! When things do not go well- that makes our faith stronger. As I Peter 1:7 puts it, the tested genuineness of our faith is proven by trials! So if you want stronger faith- then it may be that Christ will use trials and hardships to produce this strong faith within you! To refine your faith like gold in a furnace! Not quite what prosperity gospel preachers tell you- is it! So a strong faith is a steadfast, persistent and resilient faith! That is not easily shaken or broken- but rather holds on to the promises of Christ even in the fire and the flood!

III. The Fruit of Faith

Coming back to our text, when asked about strengthened faith Jesus tells the disciples about the power of faith- even when that faith is weak and small. In giving us this picture, Jesus is once again making it clear- where does the true power of faith reside? Is the power of faith found in the strength of the person who has faith- or is the strength of faith found in the one who is the object of that faith? To say this another way- Jesus says that if your faith is small- God's hand is not shortened. The small faith of v. 6- is a childlike faith. This is genuine faith- and that genuine faith- albeit small- is linked to Christ- and that is what matters. Since that faith hold's on to God- and our God is all powerful- that person's future is not limited by the weakness of their faith! To put this another way- it is not the size of the faith that matters- but the power of the God in whom our faith depends! If your faith is true and sincere- then you have been joined and united to Christ who is the power and image of the invisible God! And when it come to the power of God, there is nothing that He cannot do! It is not our faith that moves trees in v. 6- nor is it our faith that moves mountains in Mark 11:23. It was not the faith of the apostles that healed the sick or cast out demons. No- it is the God of our faith that replants trees and uproots mountains! The size of our

faith does not determine the end result! We see this in history- people of weak faith can be healed while people of strong, mature faith can get sick and die. There is no direct correlation between the size or strength of your faith and what you receive in this world! That is very liberating! I have heard prosperity gospel preachers say- the reason you are sick is because you did not have enough faith! Or the reason your family member died is because you did not believe hard enough! No, that is not what Jesus is teaching here! Weak faith can do powerful things- because of the power of our God in whom our faith relies! And when Jesus speaks about the Mountain being uprooted- and the fig tree planted in the sea- He is using images that were filled with typology. The fig tree and the mountain are pictures of Israel, God's Kingdom, and the establishment of the New Covenant. In order to prove the power of God- the one in whom our faith relies- we need only look at history! If you read about a people taken out of Egypt and carried on eagle's wings – to be planted in the Land of Milk and Honey- you know that it was not the faith of the Israelites that made all these things happen! And when we look at the church- the establishment of the Kingdom of God on this earth today- we know that it is not by the power or strength of our faith that brought this to be! No- it was accomplished because of the power of the One in who we trust! Jesus is not saying that you can do anything you want just because you believe in yourself. No- don't expect trees to jump and mountains to move because you want them to! Rather, when you trust in Christ and the power of our God- then you can expect the impossible to be possible- because you have already seen a tree uprooted and replanted in Canaan- and a mountain moved as a new Kingdom has been established- a Kingdom not built by human hands! HE can and has done the impossible- even coming back from the grave and giving us victory over death!

To conclude, it is not great faith that saves- but faith in a great God! Faith healing and Prosperity Preachers put the focus on your faith- while neglecting the power of our God who is the object of our faith! Jesus teaches his disciples about the need for and power of true faith. Next week we will see how true faith leads to holy living and obedience. But to close this week remember what I Peter 1 says- that by the power of God we can confidently expect the outcome of our faith- which is the salvation of our souls!