

Optimizing Faith

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Vineyard Community Church, Morris Plains, New Jersey

Luke 17:5-6

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

6 *And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea'; and it would obey you."*

Introduction: The apostles are hearing Jesus' teaching on the importance of faith and ask him to "Increase our faith". Jesus' response is in hyperbole. "Hyperbole" is Greek for "over-casting" – as if someone were to ask directions to somewhere and you respond by throwing the rock in the right direction to set course – but to make sure they get it - you launch a missile sets the course in flames and smoke. It flies beyond the destination asked about and explodes in a fireball. And you say – "See all that? Go that way!"

Jesus is "over-casting" here when he says that a mulberry tree will uproot itself and be planted in the ocean if we have enough faith. He is not suggesting that we start a new aqua-farming endeavor. He is giving us an over-casted example of how powerful faith is.

The disciples ask for more faith and Jesus tells them a measure of faith equal to a mustard seed (nearly a microscopic size seed) will enable things beyond our wildest imagination to occur if used properly. In a nice way, Jesus is responding to the disciples request for an increase in faith by saying – “why don’t you just use what you have.”

- I. Every good gift and every and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. (*James 1:17*)

- A. Faith is a gift.

I Corinthians 12 says there is a special gift of faith for an entire church to use at times. But to everyone faith is granted!

1. “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” (Romans 12:3 ESV)
2. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Hebrews 11:1 says that “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

It is an essential. In fact, **Hebrews 11:6** declares that “*without faith it is impossible to please God*”.

II. Faith is not blind but is a spiritual sixth sense. It allows us to see things by virtue of having “an assurance” of realities that exist before the throne of God.

A. Faith is a conduit by which God blesses us. It is a roadway.

1. Obviously, we do want faith, but we want it for what it brings to and through us; not because of what it is in and of itself.

That would be like wanting an oil well. It is not the wells that oil producing nations want; it is the oil that comes up because of them.

a. I have always admired the design and construction of the German Autobahn that was designed to allow cars to travel across Germany without a speed limit. They are designed to allow a car to travel at its fastest speed and made with such quality that they rarely have issues like pot holes and cracks.

President Eisenhower created the Interstate system in America, following the path of Germany.

In New Jersey, the roads are built over paths made originally by cows looking for pasture or water; animals doing the same wore those paths. So unless you are looking for a bale of hay or a pond you will rarely go directly to your destination in New Jersey. I prefer my roads to be engineered by Hans and Fritz, not Daisy the Cow.

2. St. John the apostle declared to us in his epistles that God is love and that the Son of God is life itself. Faith is the conduit that God's love runs through in our lives.
3. To add to this, *I Corinthians 13:2* says:

"If I have all faith so as to remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing."

So when we put our text of *Luke 17* along side of *I John*; then if we throw in the *I Corinthians* passage; we seemingly, have a conflict in perspective, if not philosophically, between these scriptures which say that without love, *and God is love*, that faith in any amount is useless; yet again in *Hebrews 11* passage that says that *"without faith it is impossible to please Him."*

Love is what reinforces faith. Faith crumbles without love.

B. So is the Bible in contradiction to itself? Certainly it is not. We are being shown that faith without God's love is like getting all dressed up to go to the ball, but not having a date.

1. Did you have to go to the prom without a date, your only escort, your hope; hoping you could get a dance with the most beautiful girl, or the most handsome young man? That is the way so many people view faith.
2. Hope is good. Hope is from God too. Hope is actually a component of faith. Faith is like the single hydrogen atom in a molecule of water. The second atom of hydrogen with one of oxygen is essential. That is what we do when we confuse faith and hope. We live on hope but your spirit, like body will soon need hydration or you won't survive.
3. The Bible says in Romans 14:23 "*whatever is not of faith is sin*"; and James 1:14 says, "*...sin in the end brings death.*"

We may have lots of hope and self-confidence without God, who is love; but that love of God is what binds our hope to belief which produces faith. Without God's love, His powerful presence and preeminence, to bond with our hope; it will be misdirected and result in pride; which is destructive. We need that element of belief with hope. Because if we don't believe God will come through for us; and of course, in the context of

having only hope, we have blocked Him by our unbelief so He can't come through for us. Then we say, "See, God doesn't ever do anything I ask Him too.

This is why James 4: 1-2 says we don't receive - because we ask for something that is out of God's plan for us.

Conclusion

Two traveling angels stopped to spend the night in the home of a wealthy family. The family was rude and refused to let the angels stay in the mansions guest room. Instead the angels were given a space in the cold basement. As they made their bed on the hard floor, the older angel saw a hole in the wall and repaired it. When the younger angel asked why, the older angel replied, "Things aren't always what they seem." The next night **the** pair came to rest at the house of a very poor, but very hospitable farmer and his wife. After sharing what little food they had the couple let the angels sleep in their bed where they could have a good nights rest. When the sun came up the next morning the angels found the farmer and his wife in tears. Their only cow, whose milk had been their sole income, lay dead in the field. The younger angel was infuriated and asked the older angel, "How could you have let this happen? The first man had everything, yet you helped

him", she accused. "The second family had little but was willing to share everything, and you let their cow die!" "Things aren't always what they seem", the older angel replied. "When we stayed in the basement of the mansion, I noticed there was gold stored in that hole in the wall. Since the owner was so obsessed with greed and unwilling to share his good fortune, I sealed the wall so he wouldn't find it. Then, last night as we slept in the farmer's bed, the angel of death came for his wife. I gave her the cow instead. Things aren't always what they seem".

Sometimes this is exactly what happens when things don't turn out the way you expected. If you have faith, you just need to trust that every outcome is always to your advantage. You might not know it until some time later. This begs the questions? Where do you want to go in life? And who designed the road your on? And would God design the road you think you would want to be on?

I want my life to be on a road not designed by Dave or a notable Christian leader or author; I want it designed by Jesus. That would be the road of Faith.