

Scripture reference: Luke 17:5-10

We read in Luke 17 that Jesus said if we had faith the size of a mustard seed we could uproot a Mulberry tree and move it into the ocean. Please note that a mulberry tree is a really big tree... and a mustard seed is almost microscopic... Jesus is telling us that even the tiniest little bit of faith can do powerful things in our lives... We know that inside any seed there is life, there is power - big, beautiful things come out of little seeds That's where the power and the life is - inside that seed. Inside our faith is where we find strength and power. Inside our faith is where we find the promise of God's word; in His promise of everlasting life. Inside our faith is where we discover that our purpose is to serve others, to be good servants for God; to be profitable servants - servants that are beneficial, that are useful to God. It's all about faith... big, beautiful things come out of faith...

Having faith is a clear indicator that we believe in God - if we didn't there would be no need for faith. And if we didn't have faith, well, God would NOT be impressed with anything you or I did.

A person who works hard for church - the universal church - and yet has no faith - is an unprofitable servant - A servant that is of no use to God, who is not beneficial to God's purpose.

A rather dramatic example of this comes from a paper I read this past week. In 2010, Tufts University in Massachusetts did a study of preachers in different denominations. They asked them if they really believed what they were preaching. Some of the responses they received included one preacher revealing that he "no longer believes that God exists, but his church members do not know it." Another said he was not convinced of Christian teachings in Scripture but he continue to preach because "it's the only way of life I know." And still another declared that he didn't believe in the Bible but remains in the ministry "largely for financial reasons." These preachers are not profitable servants for God. They are not living out His purpose in their lives - not because they don't work hard, but because they have no faith that God even exists... Hebrews 11 says, "... without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who diligently seek him." We are rewarded for seeking him, for seeking to live in His image, and doing so with the faith that our belief in Him will bring us the reward of everlasting life with our savior Jesus Christ.

Living in faith we are travelling on a two way street. The faith of a good servant of God is one who believes that this is a joint venture with Him.

For example:

One day a small boy tried to lift a heavy stone, but couldn't budge it. His father, watching, finally said, "Are you using all your strength?" "Yes, I am!" cried the boy. "No, you're not," said the father. "You haven't asked me to help you."

Too often, Christians try to do Christianity all by themselves. They don't ask God for help - they don't expect God's help - because they don't believe that God rewards those who diligently seek him.

How many of you have heard the saying "God helps those who help themselves."? Well, that statement is simply not true. That statement is actually not found anywhere in Scripture. It comes from Aesop's fable, Hercules and the Wagoneer, where a man asks Hercules to help him get his wagon out of the mud. But Hercules can't be bothered so he replies; "Man, don't sprawl there. Get up and put your shoulder to the wheel. The gods (not God) help them that help themselves." It's part of a fable - a fictional, false, story meant to have some kind of moral lesson attached. Scripture doesn't teach that God helps those who help themselves, quite the opposite in fact. In our readings, in following the teachings of God through the old testament and through Christ in the New Testament, we see that God is looking for those who help others, those who serve in His name.

Those who seek Him to help them in their service to others. He is looking for a servant, one who is beneficial and useful to His purpose..

God is working in you to help make this happen - just as we turn to Him, He comes to us. Paul writes to the Philippians, "it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." (Philippians 2:13). God is working in us not only so that we stay in the correct lane on this two way street, but so that we help others to walk away from sin and to stay in the correct lane. In your pursuit to do just that, to help people find and stay in the correct lane, are you going to say, "Thanks, but no thanks. I got this on my own."? That's not faith, that's a one way street; Or are you going to say, "I believe... God, help me to do your will, to overcome my unbelief." THAT is faith, that is a two way street..

There is one more thing I want to share with you about being a useful and beneficial, a "profitable servant", and this is really important... I could do everything I do for the kingdom of God, I could have faith to move mountains... faith that God will make everything okay in the end; and it would all mean nothing without this one thing...

The verse before our reading began says this: "...So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." (Luke 17:4)

If we do not forgive others of their sins against us, we are not helping God, we are not being profitable for God. We can do our devotions every day, pray without ceasing, support different missions, give large donations to the church, witness for Christ until the day of judgement and it won't make a bit of difference. It won't matter at all because unless we forgive, we can not be profitable servants to God's purpose. If we cannot forgive, we will hurt His kingdom and damage His church - and that is not profitable for our God...

This one thing, this forgiving, is so important that Jesus taught this in what we call the Lord's Prayer. You know the verse: "...Give us this day our daily bread and FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US..."

And Jesus meant it. In fact, right after he taught His disciples that prayer, He said this: "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." (Matthew 6:14-15)

When you become a Christian, that's what it is all about - the forgiveness of sin. Jesus shed his blood so that our sins would be forgiven.

As servants of God, as profitable servants of God, we are called on to do the same to those who have sinned against us. **Ephesians 4:32** tells us to “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Forgiving others of their sins against us is not an option.

When you became a Christian, God forgave you of your sins immediately and freely. God did not forgive you because you deserved it. He forgave you because you needed mercy. In the same way, He doesn't ask any one of us to forgive others because they deserve it but because as He showed us mercy, He expects us to show mercy to others. God has faith in us; faith that we will come to know Him and be the kind of people He created us to be. And we have to have faith in Him; faith in His word, and in His forgiveness. Faith to turn to him and to live in faith according to his will. His faith is us and our faith in Him... It goes two ways.

To Live in faith, we must serve in faith - when we feel our faith is too small, is not enough for our God, remember the size of the mustard seed... a little is enough to find the strength to serve.

Helen Keller once said: “Faith is the strength by which a shattered world shall emerge into the light.” and Mother Teresa encourages our trust in faith in her words: “Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies.”

We can all have moments of doubt, of fear; moments of uncertainty. We can find comfort and encouragement in many places. God's faith in us is clearly stated in scripture, in prose and in song. Perhaps one of the most inspiring places to squash our uncertainty is found in song. “Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father, there is no shadow of turning with thee; Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not... All I have needed Thy hand hath provided - Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!”

And

“Your love never fails, and never gives up. It never runs out on me... On and on and on and on it goes... it overwhelms and satisfies my soul... and I never, ever, have to be afraid... Your love never fails, and never gives up, it never runs out on me.”

I have faith - I believe that God not only exists but that He will reward those who diligently seek Him. This is a two way street remember?

Let us all continue to believe in God's faith in us, and continue to seek power and strength in the faith that we have in God. We need both. AMEN