

All Christians want great faith. Often we look around us and see others that seem to be at great peace, have great joy, or great love, or do great work, and we say to ourselves, “if I had such great faith, I would be able to you can fill in the blank with what you want to do most for the Lord. But Jesus taught the apostles and therefore is teaching us to use what you have for “Kingdom Living” and what you have will be enough for what God wants you to do.

In our scripture Jesus had warned the Pharisees about the sin of loving money, He then turned to His disciples to warn them about possible sins in their lives. I was trying hard to connect the pieces of information to make a picture, like when you do a puzzle. But our scripture is part of a series of little lessons that speak about different issues of our walk of faith and “Kingdom Living.” First Jesus told the disciples there would be occasions to stumble, but that they must make sure that they were not the ones to cause others to stumble.

Kennedy Williamson tells of an old man who was dying. Something was obviously worrying him. He told them at last what it was. “When I was a lad,” he said, “I often played on a wide common. Near its centre two roads met and crossed, and, standing at the cross-roads, was an old rickety sign-post. I remember one day twisting it round in its socket, thus altering the arms and making them point in the wrong direction; and I’ve been wondering ever since how many travelers I sent on the wrong road.”

Jesus moved to the next subject. Suppose you are not the one who does the sinning, but suppose another believer sins against you. Jesus instructed if a brother or sister does sin against us, we should give a private but loving talking to about how they can correct their behavior. Our tendency might be to feel hurt deep down inside, nurse a grudge, and then tell others what happened to us, but this is the wrong approach. We are “Speak the truth in love” so we take the first step toward

solving our personal differences. Our aim must not be to embarrass or hurt the offender, but to encourage him or her to repent (feel regret and ask for forgiveness). If the offender does repent, then we must forgive. In fact, we must be in the habit of forgiving, for others might sin against us seven times a day—or even seventy times seven! The Rabbis had a saying that if one forgave another three times, one was a perfect person. Jesus' standard takes the rabbinic standard, doubles it and adds one; but it is not a matter of calculation. It simply means that the Christian standard of forgiveness must exceed the best the world can achieve. We should always be ready to forgive others, because one day we may want them to forgive us! But the disciples found this lesson on unlimited forgiveness something that sounded impossible for them to do. And if we are honest, many times we say we forgive, but we are hurt deep in our hearts because of “un-forgiven” offenses committed against us years ago. Some of us carry them like badges of honor, but don't realize how un-forgiveness wears us down.

So we might have expected the disciples to respond with the prayer, “Increase our love!” Certainly love is a key element in forgiveness, but faith is even more important. It takes living faith to obey these instructions and forgive others. Our obedience in forgiving others shows that we are trusting God to take care of the consequences, handle the possible misunderstandings, and work everything out for our good and God's glory.

Mature Christians understand that forgiveness is not a cheap exchange of words, the way squabbling children often frivolously say “I'm sorry” to each other. True forgiveness always involves pain; somebody has been hurt and there is a price to pay in healing the wound. Love motivates us to forgive, but faith activates that forgiveness so that God can use it to work blessings in the lives of God's people.

Then Jesus tells them about the mustard seed in response to the request for more faith to do the things that he instructed, in fact Jesus is teaching that faith is

the greatest force in the world. Our first responsibility is to have faith. When the disciples asked Jesus for more faith, He answered that they didn't need not more faith but the right kind of faith. Jesus' image of the mustard seed brings to mind the idea of life and growth. The mustard seed is very small, the smallest known seed, but it has life in it and, therefore, it can grow and produce, and do amazingly miraculous things, such as uprooting a mulberry tree, a tree with deep roots. I hope this does not cause any of us to not call the tree doctor when we need a tree removed. We must again remember that it was the eastern custom to use language in the most vivid possible way. This saying means that even that which looks completely impossible becomes possible, if it is approached with faith. If our faith is a living faith, it will grow and enable us to obey God's commands. We have only to think of the number of scientific marvels, of the number of surgical operations, of the feats of endurance which today have been achieved and which less than fifty years ago would have been regarded as utterly impossible. Have you noticed if we approach a task saying, "It can't be done," it will not be done; but if we approach it saying, "It must be done," the chances are that it will. It reminds me of that song that Frank Sinatra sang about the Ant and the Rubber Tree. We must always remember that we approach no task alone, but that with us there is God and all God's power. With God's help we can show our faith and our love.

Human nature being what it is, there will always be offenses that can easily become opportunities for sin. God's people must get into the habit of facing these offenses honestly and lovingly, and forgiving others when they repent. The Anglican pastor and poet George Herbert wrote, "He who cannot forgive breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass." Our mustard seed size faith will help us love and forgive.

Jesus now moves to another lesson. The disciples' second responsibility toward God was humble service. There was a danger that the Twelve might get so carried

away with transplanting trees that they would ignore the everyday responsibilities of life! Faith that does not result in faithfulness will not accomplish God's work. It is good to have faith to do the difficult and the impossible, but it is essential that we have faith to do even the routine tasks our Master has committed to us. We must remember that privileges must always be balanced with responsibilities.

The servant in the story was evidently a "jack-of-all-trades," because he was responsible for farming, shepherding, and cooking. It was not unusual for people with only modest means to hire at least one servant, but Jesus described a situation which in that day was unthinkable: a master ministering to his servant! In fact, He introduced the story with a phrase that means, "Can any of you imagine?"... Their answer had to be, "No, we cannot imagine such a thing!"

Jesus had already discussed His relationship to His servants and had promised to serve them if they were faithful and we discussed that in Luke 12:35–38. He Himself was among them as a servant, even though He was Master of all. So this story emphasizes faithfulness to duty no matter what the demands might be. If a common servant is faithful to obey the orders of his master who does not reward or thank him, how much more ought Christ's disciples to obey our loving Master, who has promised to reward us graciously!

A faithful servant should not expect any special reward, since he did only what he was told to do. This servant was indeed profitable; after all, he cared for his master's fields, flocks, and food. The statement "unprofitable" here means, "My master does not owe me anything extra." The fact that Jesus will reward His servants is wholly a matter of God's grace. We do not deserve anything because we have obeyed Him and served Him.

As God's servants, we must have the right attitude toward our duties. There are two extremes to avoid: we merely do our duty in a slavish way because we have to, or we can do our duty because we hope to gain a reward. Christian industrialist

R.G. LeTourneau used to say, “If you give because it pays, it won’t pay.” This principle also applies to service. Both extremes are seen in the attitudes of the elder brother that we learned about in the parable of the Prodigal Son. Remember that the older brother was miserably obedient, always hoping that his father would let him have a party with his friends.

So what is the proper Christian attitude for service? According to Ephesians 6:6 it is “Doing the will of God from the heart.” John 14:15 teaches “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” To the Christian, “His commandments are not grievous, *but a joy.*” Serving God is a delight, not just a duty, and we obey God because we love God. “I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart” (Ps. 40:8).^{1 2 3}

Our question today has been do you have mustard seed faith to live the Christian life, to forgive, and to serve God? We don’t need more faith, we just need to use the faith we have. Today we have seeds to remind us of this lesson on mustard seed faith. I ask that you plant them and bring them back in the spring to decorate our sanctuary. As they grow ask God to allow you to use your faith to forgive others and serve God.

¹Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Lk 17:1

²Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:248

³Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Luke*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 214