

Increase our Faith
Luke 17:5-6

As Christians, probably the most common way that we describe the “bond” that we have with our Lord is by using the word “relationship”, “relationship”. And so, as we examine these precious words of our scripture passage for today, that is the word I will use most, “relationship”.

And yes, our “relationship” with our Lord does have many ways of expressing itself, many differing characteristics and qualities to it, of which we are told in the Book of Matthew the most important part is “love”, “love”.

We know that because, when the Lord Jesus was asked what the most important of all the commandments was, He said without hesitation, that it is to ³⁷ . . . “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

From these words, dear Christian, we can know that this part of our relationship with our Lord is, by far, the most important part . . . “Love”, loving our Lord and then loving people.

But I must confess to you that as I have observed myself and my own relationship with my Lord over these many years, some of those characteristics and qualities of my relationship with Him do not come easily to my often sinful heart and soul and mind, especially this most important part, that of “love”.

And as I have tried to understand and to overcome the barrier to my having the intimate love relationship that I know I should have with the Lord Jesus, I believe that I have found the greatest barrier to be the same barrier that the Lord’s disciples suffered, a “lack of faith”, “my lack of faith”.

And in the scripture passage that we will study today, that was the cry of the Lord’s disciples, for Him to “increase their faith”. Those words and also Jesus’ response in verse 5 of Luke chapter 17.

⁵ . . . 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. (Luke 17:5-6)

Curiously, here as the disciples cried out to the Lord Jesus to increase their faith, Jesus' response was not the response we might hope for, that being a quick and easy explanation as to how He might go about doing that, "increasing our faith". Jesus instead simply explained how just a tiny increase in their faith could bring about powerful and mighty outcomes.

And as I have pondered Jesus's response, I have concluded that the answer to this plea to "increase our faith" is a much, much bigger answer than just a quick and easy response. And it especially involves our truly coming to know the real object of our faith, the One from whom and through whom the "hoped for" blessings of faith will come, to know God Himself, to know God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

And we really need to begin doing that now, today. We need to set our hearts on a never-ending quest to truly know, to comprehend, to apprehend the height, the length, the breath of who our Lord really is, and again, that can only be done through "faith", "real faith".

And may we begin our quest to "know Him" with these very special words given to us in the Book of Hebrews, chapter 11, where the Holy Spirit tells us that,

1. . . faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)

Those words again,

¹Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)

These are such a simple selection of words that our Lord uses to define "faith. And at first glance they seem to be relatively plain and uncomplicated. But then, as we consider them further, we begin to realize that these words are not at all simple and uncomplicated. They are, in reality, some of the most incomprehensible words that we will ever encounter in our relationship with God, filled with mysterious meaning. And we can understand why these disciples cried out to Jesus to "increase their faith".

As we mentioned a moment ago, for us to truly ever begin to fathom the mysterious meaning of “faith”, we really do need to first begin to know the “One” who is the Object of our faith, God Himself, His nature, His character, His holiness, His immeasurable love toward us?”

But immediately then, we realize that just as with these disciples, there seems to be a roadblock, a barrier that stands between us and our ability to truly know God and to have the faith in Him that we so desperately need. And what could that roadblock be? What is standing in our path preventing us from quickly and easily coming to know Him.

Simply put, that roadblock is our natural human condition that is born into us at our birth. Our human condition, our natural mind does not have, and will never have the ability to reach into such depths of understanding. Because, like this matter of “faith”, there is a great and profound “mystery” that surrounds the person of God, a mystery that shrouds Him like a “veil” and prevents our being able to intellectually perceive and understand and explain Him as we are able to do with so many of the other, more “natural” things of this life.

And that mystery presents us with a deep and difficult dilemma. It is very similar to what our scholars call “circular reasoning”. We do desperately need to know our God, but by these, and other words like them, we are being told that the only pathway to our knowing our God is through this other equally mysterious thing that we are considering here today, this thing that God calls “faith”.

And yes, this truly is a kind of dilemma for us, because again, the only way for us to know the unknowable person of God will be through this mysterious provision of “faith”, simple “faith”.

And please, may we understand these next words clearly and plainly! This “faith” that Jesus is teaching us about here is not just one of many entrances into our knowledge of God. Faith is the “only” entrance, the “only” entrance. There is no other!

And may I repeat those words again? “Faith” is not just one of many entrances into our knowledge of God. Faith is the “only” entrance. There is no other way!

And that fact mystifies the average logical thinking mind like mine, because “faith” as a means of understanding, simply does not make sense. Faith cannot

“know” something, at least not in the traditional sense of knowledge. In reality, faith very often stands in direct opposition to knowledge . . . in direct opposition to ordinary facts and logic and common sense.

And even though you and I may have some “degree” of faith, we ourselves struggle to be able to explain to someone else what it really means. What can you say about a concept that is not really real, at least within the definition that we commonly refer to as “real”, a concept that cannot be seen or otherwise perceived with our natural senses, and that cannot be measured until it takes place, a concept that resides somewhere in-between the real things around us and the unseen nature of things hoped for? Listen to those words again!

¹Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)

In the Hebrew language as it's found in Genesis 15:6 where we are told that “Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness.” That word for “believed” is the word “Emunah”, “Emunah” which means “Belief” and “Faith”, with the best definition of those words being that “Faith is an innate conviction that transcends reason!”

Let me say that again, because, for me, these words are some of the most profound words I have ever encountered. Listen!

“Faith is an innate conviction that transcends reason!”

“Faith is an innate conviction that transcends reason!”

These words tell us that no, we cannot “think it out”, “reason it out”, intellectually define it, or use any other of those ordinary ways to understand faith. Faith transcends reason!

Faith is simply a “conviction” that takes control over our mind, our heart, our soul to such an extent that we begin to do the next thing as if all of it is really real, as real as anything else that we can feel, see, taste and hear. Really real!

And then as we combine all of this understanding with the simple definition for faith that's given to us in Hebrews 11:1, for myself, I get left with only one option and that is to simply accept the truth of it all and to rest my soul in the belief of it, and then move on ahead with strong conviction and without any doubts, doing that next thing in front of me with full confidence.

¹Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)

Folks, at the risk of being overly repetitive, I want to say all of this again. The implication of these words is that, if we have faith, that “innate conviction that transcends reason”, then the things that we “hope for” can actually become “real”, can actually take place. Things not yet in reality, things “unseen”, things invisible to our eye, to our mind, things not yet even in existence. Even those things of an impossible nature can somehow become “substance” and real and take place. Like the uprooting of a mulberry tree and then replanting it in the depths of the sea.

And yes dear Christians, such considerations as these tread into territories that our minds can't rationalize, that “simple belief” can cause that which is “unseen”, “unreal”, even “impossible”, to become real and visible and evident.

And yes, as with all other things in existence, it is God who does the real work behind it all. But here in this scripture passage and many other passages like it, God is telling us that the “change” from that which is “hoped for” into that which becomes “real” also involves something that must take place within you and me.

I confess to you folks that I do dearly love to ponder these wonderful mysteries of our God, especially how He interweaves the incomprehensible power of His Holy Spirit into His intimate relationship with us.

And that seems to be the way that “faith” works within your and my life. It begins with God's Holy Spirit, who then brings about and inspires a response within us, a response that ebbs up from deep within our heart, a supernatural agreement between our soul and the Spirit of God! And then, though we are not able to understand its ways, it suddenly overflows up out of our hearts and enables us to see things, to know things and to do things that we otherwise could not even imagine, “an innate conviction that transcends reason”, an innate conviction, the greatest of which is “to know and to believe and to trust that God “is”, “He truly is”, and that He will do all that He promises to us.

Strangely and sadly so, men and women, all over this world, through their own human efforts study daily to know God, but never attain to it. They try to form God into different shapes and beings, intellectually striving to draw near to Him

and to understand Him, calling Him by different names, trying to carve Him out of wood and stone, but always falling short, never understanding that it is through the simple act of faith that true knowledge of God can begin.

But again, God has chosen “faith”, simple “faith” to be the only entrance of our knowledge of Him, the only entrance. And faith and the foolishness that faith implies, simply “flies into the face” of most all forms of logical thought.

Who among us would, through faith, believe that they could pass through the fires of a furnace and live? The three Hebrew children did.

And who among us would dare think that they could walk among hungry lions and live? Daniel did!

And who among us is willing to believe these words that Jesus gives to us in today's text where He has said,

⁶ . . . "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. (Luke 17:6)

And the question for you and me is, will we, will you, will I ever have this kind of faith? We can folks, and we really should, because God's words are that trustworthy.

But how will “faith”, real believing “faith” ever take place within our souls?

Sadly, we too often misunderstand how we get from where we are to where we need to be in our faith. We too often confuse ourselves by thinking that “faith” is some mystical feeling that we must muster up from within our own strength. But dear Christian, we will never be able to generate faith from within our own souls! No, “faith”, real “faith” must come to us as a “gift” from whom all blessings flow, a gift directly from the Hand of God through “Grace”.

The disciples, early on, encountered that profound mystery when confronted by the very simplistic words in the “Parable of the Sower.” They and many others around them heard the words of Jesus, but could not understand their meaning.

Thankfully, the disciples did later ask Jesus to explain His words. And Jesus said to them there in Matthew chapter 13,

¹¹ . . . “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. (Matthew 13:11)

Folks, the privilege of knowing the mysteries of God is not freely given to just anyone and everyone. And why God chooses to do it that way we might never really know, but it's nonetheless true. The mysteries of the kingdom of God are reserved as a “gift” for the few, those who, through “faith”, truly desire to know and to love the Lord our God.

Thankfully, to know and to love the Lord our God, and to embrace the deep mysteries that are found in Him does not require that we have some special intellectual knowledge. Yes, we are commanded to love the Lord our God with all of our mind as well as with our heart and soul. But in these words our Lord is speaking about what He calls in Romans 12, a “Renewed mind”, not the secular intellectual mind that is so prevalent within our world today.

And it is when our “renewed mind” is empowered by simple childlike faith that we can then begin to truly know the Person of our God.

In my “visual” manner of thinking, my mind pictures a great chasm that separates us from even the simplest knowledge of God, a chasm that cannot be bridged by human abilities. And reaching across that great chasm, lies only one possible and very narrow pathway, the pathway of “faith in Christ”.

I have often observed this very simple truth taking place in the hearts and minds of so many otherwise brilliant people, how they can get to the very edge of that chasm, but cannot seem to find that narrow pathway over to God.

Unbeknownst to their brilliant minds, at the edge of that chasm is where the natural things of this existence ends and the supernatural things of God begins. And the only way to traverse that chasm is through “faith”.

Knowledge of God and all of the wonders of salvation and of eternal life reside just on the other side of the depths of that chasm, and simple faith in Christ provides a bridge across to it, but they cannot grasp that simple truth.

But folks, you and I need to understand that the natural things of this earth and the supernatural things of God DO NOT have to remain separated. They can be linked, inseparably, intertwined together. But such things can only be had

through this thing that we are considering here today, through faith . . . simple, childlike “faith”.

A question for you and me today as we close, “Do we really believe this?” “Do we believe that that which is otherwise impossible can become real in the many intimate and personal matters of our daily lives?”

I’m reminded of a simple truth that I heard a favorite bible teacher give recently. He said that we can have faith that God will enable the next thing that we are about to do because we remember His faithfulness to us in the many past things that He has done for us.

The bible teacher using the example of King David, as a young boy, when he came up against the overwhelming might and power of Goliath, remembered boldly how God had given him victory over a lion and a bear as he protected his sheep. And so, with great “faith” he ran without fear into the battle against Goliath and was able to easily slay the giant.

And yes, David had probably practiced often with his sling and was probably very accurate. But please, please don’t fall back to your “commonsense” explanation about what took place that day, how David was so proficient with his sling. Folks, that victory belonged to God. God directed that stone to go exactly where it was supposed to go. David’s only task was to have the simple faith to believe that God would go before him and bring him success. David’s words to Goliath,

⁴⁵ . . . “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶ This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. ⁴⁷ All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.” (1 Samuel 17:45-47)

And folks, this same response should be true for you and for me. We should look at God’s faithfulness to us in all His many past provisions and know that He will be just as faithful in the next things that we have in front of us.

As these words of Hebrews 11 tell us, the things “hoped for” will become “real”. Faith can and will bring unseen, hoped-for things into reality, beginning with our “eternal life” with God, and then extending on out into all the many matters of our daily life, into matters of family and of health and of finances, and especially into such things as peace and comfort within our souls.

Here in these words, as the disciples cried out to Jesus for Him to “increase their faith”, we can know that He is the one that we must go to for our faith. Just as the disciples knew who to turn to when their boat was about to sink in the storm, so it is with us and to all who want to have the faith that we’ve been considering here today. He, the Lord Jesus, is the One we must turn to. He is the giver of all the “good and perfect gifts”, and “faith” is one of those most precious of His “gifts”, and He will surely give us “faith”.

Can it be any more clear folks. These words of our scripture passage are telling us exactly what we are to do in our quest for a greater faith. We must do as the disciples did and to cry out to the Lord Jesus, the one and only source of the good and perfect gift of faith. And then yes, dear Christian, He, The Lord Jesus, will give the “gift of faith” to us.

As a closing thought, may I give us some encouraging words from the Apostle Paul about the mysterious steps of faith that we are considering here today. This is where the Apostle Paul was in his walk of faith, and if we are ever tempted to be discouraged in our own walk of faith, may we turn to these words here in the Book of Philippians chapter 3, and say as the Apostle Paul said,

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14)

Pray with me!