

The Wonderful Power Which Even The Weakest Faith Bestows.

Text: Luke 17:1-10

Suggested Hymns:

321, 379, 392, TLH381T432LH, 395

1) It Must Be True, Genuine Faith,
Though It Be Ever So Weak.

2) Such True Faith, Weak Though It Be, Bestows
Powers Which Nothing Else Can Or Will Bestow

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 17:1-10, ¹ *Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come!"* ² *It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.*

³ *Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.* ⁴ *And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."*

⁵ *And 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.*

⁷ *And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'?* ⁸ *But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'?*

⁹ *Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not.* ¹⁰ *So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'*" (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Our text seems to deal with a number of different subjects, too many to be treated with some degree of thoroughness in one sermon.

But if you examine all these verses with care, you will notice that there is one matter which outclasses all others in importance and gives the key to the right understanding of all that is said in this wonderful and impressive discourse of our blessed Saviour. That matter is faith. Our theme for today is *The Wonderful Power which Even the Weakest Faith Bestows*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

**1. The Wonderful Power Which Even The Weakest Faith Bestows.
It Must Be True, Genuine Faith,
Though It Be Ever So Weak.**

In the very beginning of this text, Jesus speaks severe words. He pronounces a terrifying judgement upon those people who give offence. Then Jesus adds that Christians must be willing to forgive their neighbour.

They are to forgive even though the neighbour sins against the Christian seven times in one day, if he repents, he is to be forgiven. The disciples realised that this was more than they could do. They suddenly became conscious of their spiritual weakness, for which reason they prayed to Jesus, ***“Increase our faith.”***

Then the Lord tells them that, if they had faith as a grain of mustard-seed, such weak faith would bestow the most wonderful powers upon them. We read 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.***

By these words, Jesus impresses upon His disciples a very important truth, namely, that it is not necessary to have strong faith to do great things, but that it is necessary that our faith be true and genuine.

We are all naturally inclined to wish to have power and to do great things. We want to feel very happy and sure of our blessings. We admire power and accomplishment in others.

We are therefore often impressed with the apparent certainty, firmness of conviction, joyous enthusiasm, irrepressible power, with which some idea has taken hold of another person. This fervour, this certainty, this enthusiasm, wins

our admiration, and we sigh, *“Oh, if we could be so enthusiastic, so certain of our faith, so happy in our convictions!”*

At such times it is necessary to be on our guard and to remember that fervour, enthusiasm, certainty, joy of conviction, are good — if we are right. But they are all fatal if we are wrong.

The harder a man runs, if he runs in the wrong direction, the further he gets away from the place to which he wants to go, whereas one who is walking in the right direction, no matter how slowly and quietly he is moving, will finally reach his goal.

Therefore listen to that old proverb which says: *“Be sure you are right, then go ahead,”* otherwise: *“The more haste, the less speed.”*

Scarcely is any one more enthusiastic, more certain that he is right, and more devoted to his purpose than the gambler. But no one regrets his enthusiasm and haste and joy of conviction more bitterly than he does.

All this is true of faith also. Joyous, enthusiastic, certain, and great faith is a blessed gift; but first of all we must be sure that our faith is the true faith. Therefore it was when the disciples prayed *to the Lord, “Increase our faith,”* that Jesus answered, *“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.* Jesus impressed on His disciples and us, that it is essential that our faith be true and genuine.

And when is our faith true and genuine? When it rests upon the clear and specific word of God. We have true faith if we accept as true what God has said because God has said it. We are sure of something because God through His Word has made us sure of it.

Thomas, doubting Thomas, confused the certainty of earthly knowledge, obtained through our senses, with the spiritual certainty created in us by the Word of God.

Thomas said that he would believe the resurrection of Jesus if he saw the nail-prints in the hands of the living Master and the wounds in His side. Jesus told him, *“Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are*

those who have not seen and yet have believed."¹ Thereby Jesus said that the certainty of faith does not come to us through our senses.

If I hear a person speak, I do not need to believe that he can speak — I know it. If I see a person walk, I do not need to believe that he can walk — I know it. We read in Hebrews 11:1, ***¹ Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.***

When I have a meal before me and I am eating it, I do not need to believe that I shall have a meal today — I know it. But if God says to me, ***seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you,***² and these words create in me the certainty that all these things will be added from day to day, that is faith. I have not seen these things as yet. I believe what God promises me.

Apply all this to faith in prayer. People say that they will believe in God and the efficacy of prayer if God gives them what they ask for. That is not faith; that is speculation. The Christian believes that God hears a right prayer whether God gives him what he asked for or not. The Christian believes God's promises concerning prayer.

When Ahithophel, the wise counsellor of David, turned against his master, David prayed, ***"Lord, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness."***³ God heard that prayer. He did not turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness, but He prevented Absalom from accepting the counsel of Ahithophel. That served the same purpose.

David thought that turning the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness would be the only way in which he could be protected. But God showed him that he could be protected in another way. And, after all, David was not concerned so much with the counsel of Ahithophel as being protected from Absalom's power and cruelty.

Here in our text we have this statement of the Lord: ***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.*** God promises to those who have faith, even the weakest faith, the least amount of faith that can be in our possession and could be called true faith at all, that they could say to a ***mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea.'***

Now, who of us does not claim to have at least such a minimum of faith? But would we say to a *mulberry tree*, ‘*Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea*’? Remember that before you could have such faith, you would have to have the word of God which commands, ‘Speak thus to that mulberry tree, and you would have to have the promise of God that the tree will obey you.’

If we had such a command and such a promise, then the man of weakest faith, and although his faith be as little as a grain of mustard-seed, could perform this miracle. But without such a word of God we could have no such faith, not even faith as a grain of mustard-seed.

Before we can remove mountains, we must have the word of God commanding us to do it, and promising that the mountains will obey us. Before we have such word and promise, we can have no faith concerning these things, but only superstition.

Superstition is to believe as true that for which we have neither scientific proof nor a word of God. Such superstitions are, for instance, the thought that making the sign of the cross will bring you a blessing or protect you against some harm. We make the sign of the cross, not to protect ourselves, but as a matter of confession.

Sprinkling yourself with holy water and believing that it will convey to you some spiritual benefit is superstition. We have no command of God, no promise of a blessing. The foolish fear of Friday or the number thirteen as being unlucky is pure superstition. We have no command of God, no promise, no threat.

The use of water in Holy Baptism is not superstition because we have God’s command and promise. The attendance at the Lord’s Table is not superstition, but is an act of faith because we have God’s command and promise. Praying in Jesus’ name for daily bread, for healing, is not superstition, but an act of faith. We have God’s command and promise.

Remember, therefore, if you are to be enthusiastically certain, confident, joyously convinced, you must have a specific, clear word of God.

That of which we are certain, based on the testimony of our senses is not a matter of faith, that is a matter of scientific knowledge. That alone which the Word of God teaches is a matter of faith. That which neither reason teaches nor

the Word of God is a matter of superstition, and to accept it and follow it is sinful, shameful, and foolish.

This is the first thing we are to remember from our text — the true nature of God-pleasing faith. It is this faith by which we believe that *Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him*⁴ but which God has revealed to us in His Word, that wonder of wonders, *God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*⁵

2. The Wonderful Power Which Even The Weakest Faith Bestows.

**Such True Faith, Weak Though It Be,
Bestows Powers Which Nothing Else Can Or Will Bestow.**

And now this faith, however weak it be, bestows upon us the most wonderful powers. I could not begin to tell you what powers and riches and abilities such faith bestows upon us. Let us mention only those of which our text speaks.

Firstly, faith keeps us from offending our fellow-Christians, especially the little ones. It keeps us from living in gross wickedness and thus leading others into the same sins. It gives us power to discipline ourselves so as to restrict our Christian liberty, as to avoid doing even those things which we may be permitted to do, but which would mislead or offend our fellow-Christians. Faith alone can give us power to do that.

The person who can do that, can do more than the person who can remove mountains. And let us be careful to note that Jesus requires just that of His Christians. Note the striking words which He speaks here in verse 2 of our text. ² *It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.*

Secondly, such true faith gives us power also to be forgiving towards those who sin against us. Every Christian is required to be forgiving towards those who trespass against us. Every Christian prays the Lord's Prayer, and in the Fifth Petition of this prayer, we ask God to forgive us just as we forgive those who trespass against us.

But that is something which no ungodly, no unchristian person, can do. He may be able to say it with his mouth, but in his heart he does not forgive. Only the person who has faith in the forgiveness of his sins through the blood of Jesus Christ, only such a person can forgive his neighbour also.

Thinking of his own many sins and of God's untiring mercy and grace, who daily forgives us innumerable transgressions, the gratitude of the Christian makes him willing and able, although his faith be as a grain of mustard-seed, to forgive those who trespass against him.

Thirdly, such true, genuine faith, although it be ever so weak and though it be as a grain of mustard-seed, bestows upon the believer the power to serve God faithfully, without demanding anything as a reward.

No unbeliever can do that. There are unbelievers who think that they are doing God a service. They are willing to do all manner of things; they are willing even to do some fasting, to work hard, to deny themselves many comforts; but they wish to be paid for it. Their righteousness is commercialised righteousness.

They never say: "*We daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment.*" Some may say that with their mouths (and even ask pay for saying it), but none of them can say it from their hearts.

Oh, no; they expect great rewards, and if God gives them a measure of temporal success, they proudly call themselves "*self-made men.*" They speak of their business, their family, or whatever else they may have succeeded in building up like Nebuchadnezzar. We read in Daniel 4:30, ³⁰ *The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?"*

Faith alone in Jesus Christ, resting upon the Word of God, the Word of revelation, bestows upon men the power to do God's will faithfully, although imperfectly, and when they have done so, to say, as in our text, '*We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.*'

This faith alone gives us power to say from a conviction of heart: We are worthy of none of the things for which we pray, neither have we deserved them. '*Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You*

*drink? ³⁸ When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? ³⁹ Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'*⁶

Yes, we deserve nothing but punishment. But God in His great mercy and grace gives us the unspeakable riches of His creation, of His redemption, and of His sanctification, of which we speak in the three articles of the Apostles' Creed.

Oh, what marvellous power this faith bestows! What a wonderful transformation this faith, although it be as a grain of mustard-seed, works in the Christian! To make such a confession from the heart, to live such a life, is more than plucking up a *mulberry* tree by the roots, and is more than moving mountains, is more than raising the dead, or giving sight to the blind.

Let us therefore never despise such faith, however small it may be, but make sure that our faith is true and genuine, that it is created by God's Word, not by the reason of men, not through the evidence of our senses, not through the ridiculous superstitions of men, but through the Word of God, and that our faith rests upon God's Word alone.

Every article of our faith, everything that we believe in religion, must rest upon a specific and clear word of God. If such is our faith, then the greatest marvels and wonders will be wrought upon us.

It will give us more than all the powers which reason, riches, or any earthly power can bestow upon us, namely, power to live as the children of God, to bear our cross, to forgive our neighbour his trespasses, to avoid offences, and then to confess our sins and to trust in God's mercy alone.

Such faith will also bestow upon us victory over death and eternal life with our Lord in heaven.

Let us close with the words of the Hymnist,⁷

I know my faith is founded
On Jesus Christ, my God and Lord;
And this my faith confessing
Unmoved I stand upon His Word.
Man's reason cannot fathom
The truth of God profound;
Who trusts in human wisdom

Relies on shifting ground.
God's Word is all-sufficient,
It makes divinely sure,
And trusting in its wisdom,
My faith shall rest secure. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ John 20:29

² Matthew 6:33

³ 2 Samuel 15:31

⁴ 1 Corinthians 2:9

⁵ John 3:16

⁶ Matthew 25:37-39

⁷ Hymn TLH381T342LH