



Faith Series
The Force of Faith
Matthew 17:14-20
Westport Christian Church
March 21, 2010

Last week we began a series about faith. We came to the conclusion that faith is an obedient lifestyle in which we follow Christ because of who He is and what He has done for us. Faith is essentially a personal, trusting response to God, who speaks words of promise. Faith is our inner response to the Good News that God loves us, and has made a way for us to live forever with Him.

We also discovered that our faith comes from hearing the words of Christ, and how our faith must be put into action. A visitor asked an old farmer, "How is your cotton?" The farmer replied, "Didn't plant none, afraid of the boll weevil." "Well, then, how are your potatoes?" The farmer replied, "Didn't plant none, afraid of the 'tater bugs." The visitor then asked, "What did you plant?" To which the farmer said, "Didn't plant nothin', jest playing it safe." You see he took no risks and didn't harvest a crop.

Our faith must be put into action, therefore some element of risk must be taken.

In our Scripture today, we meet some of Jesus' disciples who were unwilling to take some risk and put their faith into action.

Jesus had taken Peter, James and John on up the mountain and left the other nine disciples behind. While they were there, the Bible says that Jesus was transfigured. What that means is God allowed Peter, James, and John to see Jesus in a glorified state. Not only were they allowed to see Jesus in this state, they also saw Moses and Elijah. We could say they truly had a mountain top experience.

Now, when they came down from the mountain is where our lesson begins this morning.

When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. "I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him." And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me." And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?" And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you."But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." (Matt 17:14-20 NASU)

We must understand that . . .

I. The force of faith is not simply following Jesus.

During this time, the twelve disciples which Jesus had selected had been following Him for a little over two years now, but just because they are following Him doesn't mean they are exemplifying a force of faith. After all, anyone can follow Jesus. Take Judas for example. Here was a man that walked with Jesus everyday for over a period of three years. Was he saved because he was in the presence of Christ for this period of time? The answer is no.

We know from other passages that Jesus had given the disciples the power to heal and cast out demons. And yet we just read where they could not heal this young man. Why? Because of their lack of trust in what Jesus had given them to do! It takes more than just following Jesus to have a forceful faith. It is more than being obedient to the Word of God. We must not be like Judas and think that just because we walk around with certain people that we are okay. We often think that just coming to church and being a good person will save

us. I must tell you the preacher can't save you—this building we call the church can't save you. It is only a personal relationship with Jesus Christ which can save you.

Imagine that you are out in the middle of a lake and there are two rowboats and you are standing with one foot in each boat. One boat, however, is filled with holes and is sinking fast. It is obvious that unless you do something you will soon be in the lake. The boat with the holes represents ourselves with all the leaks caused by sin. The boat without holes represents Christ. It should be obvious that with one foot in each boat we shall soon end up in the same place if had both feet in the boat marked "self." The only safe place to be is to have both feet firmly planted in the boat marked Christ. (Source unknown)

2 Cor 5:17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Gal 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."

So, the force of faith is not seen in simply following Jesus.

II. The force of faith is not seen in the littleness of faith.

In our text, those disciples that were present could not heal the boy. In verse twenty, Jesus said, "Because of the littleness of your faith." What did He mean? The problem wasn't that their faith was little. The problem was that their faith was superficial, untrusting, and an unbelieving faith. The problem wasn't that they needed more faith. The problem was they were not putting their faith into action.

When Hudson Taylor went to China, he made the voyage on a sailing vessel. As it neared the channel between the southern Malay Peninsula and the island of Sumatra, the missionary heard an urgent knock on his stateroom door. He opened it, and there stood the captain of the ship. "Mr. Taylor," he said, "we have no wind. We are drifting toward an island where the people are heathen, and I fear they are cannibals." "What can I do?" asked Taylor. "I understand that you believe in God. I want you to pray for wind." "All right Captain, I will, but you must set the sail." "Why that ridiculous! There's not even the slightest breeze. Besides, the sailors will think I'm crazy." But finally, because of Taylor's insistence, he agreed. Forty-five minutes later he returned and found the missionary still on his knees. "You can stop praying now," said the captain. "We've got more wind than we know what to do with!" (Source Unknown)

The Illustration of the mustard seed goes to quality of faith not size.

The force of our faith is in the fact that we use the faith that we have no matter how big or small it is. Our faith must be in God, for with God all things are

possible. George Mueller once said, "faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man's power ends."

So where is the force of faith found?

III. The force of faith IS seen in our commitment to Jesus Christ.

Again Jesus mentioned about faith and a mustard seed. A mustard seed is a small seed, but when it is germinated, it grows and grows. In Matthew 13, again Jesus compares a mustard seed and the kingdom of God. He says, "*The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES.*" (Matt.13:31-32NASU)

What I want us to understand this morning is the fact it isn't the size that matters, it's the sincerity. Small faith can be effective, false superficial faith is ineffective.

John Calvin said, "Faith is not a distant view but a warm embrace of Christ."

How can you embrace someone if you are not committed to them?

Now, in some of the translations, verse 21 is not included which says, with prayer and fasting. In Mark 9:29 adds that prayer and fasting are needed. "Moving mountains" was a proverbial statement that was often used to refer to overcoming difficult situations. What Jesus was saying was that the disciples couldn't heal the boy because they were not focusing on an ongoing growing personal relationship with Him!. That is where the force of faith is, in a total commitment to Jesus Christ!

Conclusion; What we need is not a giant faith or more faith. Little faith will do. What we need is a true, genuine faith that really, genuinely trust God. We need to use the faith that we have. We must have an ongoing (forward) personal relationship with Jesus Christ which is committed to His cause.

Christians pollster, George Barna states that 35-45% of Americans identify themselves as born-again Christians. Barna concludes, "Not one of the adults we interviewed said that their goal in life was to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ." (Transforming Discipleship, Greg Ogden pg 27)

Being committed to Christ means we takes time to pray. Spending time with the Lord in His word. When we spend time with God and are committed to Him, we will have a forceful faith. Jesus said that if we have this kind of faith, "nothing shall be impossible to you." Got any mountains you can't tunnel

through? Got any rivers you think are uncross-able? God specializes in things thought impossible--He does the things others cannot do!

In April 1988 the evening news reported on a photographer who was a skydiver. He had jumped from a plane along with numerous other skydivers and filmed the group as they fell and opened their parachutes. On the film shown on the telecast, as the final skydiver opened his chute, the picture went berserk. The announcer reported that the cameraman had fallen to his death, having jumped out of the plane without his parachute.

It wasn't until he reached for the absent ripcord that he realized he was free falling without a parachute. Until that point, the jump probably seemed exciting and fun. But tragically, he had acted with thoughtless haste and deadly foolishness. Nothing could save him, for his faith was in a parachute never buckled on. Faith in anything but an all-sufficient God can be just as tragic spiritually. Only with faith in Jesus Christ dare we step into the dangerous excitement of life. (*When God Was Taken Captive*, W. Aldrich, Multnomah, 1989, p. 91)

What is the force behind your faith? Is it God? To enter the kingdom, and to live victoriously in it, faith is required. Have you ask Him to be Lord of your life and be the force behind all that you do? Or are you the force behind your faith? The choice is up to you. What is your answer to Him?

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