

## **Sunday, August 31, 2025 – “INCREASE OUR FAITH” - Pastor John Henry Raskin**

Today’s sermon emphasizes the recurring theme of the past several weeks of the importance of submission to the Holy Spirit to access the abundant life Jesus offers. It discusses how true faith produces fruit in our lives and is a measure of being born again. The central question posed is how to increase one's faith, drawing parallels to increasing other aspects of life through time, effort, and focus.

- The sermon references **Hebrews 11:6** to highlight that without faith, it is impossible to please God, and that God rewards those who diligently seek Him. It stresses that faith is the doorway to everything God wants to do in our lives and that trusting God is a response to our faith.
- The sermon then examines **Luke 17**, where Jesus teaches about the high standards of forgiveness and the apostles' request for increased faith. Jesus responds by saying that even faith as small as a mustard seed can achieve great things, emphasizing that the faith they have is sufficient if they use it and trust Him.
- The sermon continues by discussing the communal nature of faith and the importance of gathering together with other believers. It highlights that faith can be increased by feeding on the Word of God and exercising it, much like increasing physical health and strength.
- Finally, the sermon concludes with a reminder that serving God diligently is our duty and that living in His service brings true freedom. It encourages believers to use the faith they have, as it will grow through use, and to live empowered lives according to Jesus' teachings.
- The Apostle Paul’s encouragement to us will truly increase our faith if we take the focus off of ourselves and our circumstances and focus on God’s ability to transform us and the trials we face.

**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. - Romans 12:1**

**The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” – Luke 17:5**

**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.’ – Jesus’ words - Luke 17:10**

## **“INCREASE OUR FAITH”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Over the last several weeks we've concentrated on how greater submission to the Holy Spirit's leading is the only way to access the abundant life that Jesus came to bestow.

A common theme in these messages is that true faith produces fruit in our lives and is in fact, according to scripture, the true measure of our being born again.

As you have listened to these messages, you may have found yourself pondering about your own faith which in the follower of Jesus leads naturally to the question how can we increase our faith?

What do you do if you want to increase the amount of money you have or the number of friends you have or your skill on an instrument or at a craft, in a sport or if you want to increase your physical strength or endurance?

How do we increase those things?

By giving time, effort and focus to them; we need to work at them and practice them and make them a priority. It's an intentional process.

Merely hoping any of those things will just happen isn't likely to make you successful. Would you agree?

And depending on your motivation you may actually be asking yourself why should I want to increase my faith?

To answer that, first, let's look at Hebrews 11:6

## **Hebrews 11:6**

**6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.**

Let's look at the very first thing this scripture says. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

We are going to explore a bit today about why that is important.

We have already established that the gift of salvation in Christ Jesus is freely given but it is faith that enables us to receive it.

Paul tells us that even that saving faith is a gift from God.

The primary reason that we want to please God is because He is worthy, and we are going to discuss that in depth in a few moments, from the perspective of Luke Chapter 17,

but there is an added bonus pertaining to the abundant life in this scripture on the screen.

It says that **He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him.**

You may want to underline the words rewarder and diligently.

God does not respond to my complaints, God does not respond to my worries, God does not respond to my bitterness or whatever, but God moves heaven and earth when I trust Him with the outcome no matter what it is.

Trusting God should be our response to our faith.

Faith is the doorway to everything God wants to do in your life.

In Matthew 9:29, when Jesus heals two blind men who cry out to Him for mercy He says to them **"According to your faith, it will be done to you"**.

According to your faith, He says, I will do it. God responds to our faith.

Let's look at Jesus words from the Gospel of Luke for more clarity.

### **Luke 17:1-5**

**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 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"**

Before we get into the Apostles request and Jesus' response, let's look at this scripture's literary context.

It is a small part of a lengthy section of teaching in Luke.

Chapter 16 included teaching on personal integrity, with particular reference to financial matters and to the Law,

and concludes with the parable of 'The Rich Man and Lazarus,' with its focus on generosity towards the poor.

Jesus was not giving mild suggestions in His teachings. He was letting His disciples and the others know in no uncertain terms that their eternal destiny depended on their obedience.

Then chapter 17 starts with a warning against being a stumbling block for others and a hard teaching on repeatedly forgiving those who repent and yet continue to transgress.

Jesus is holding his disciples to a very high standard.

No wonder the apostles come to Jesus saying, “Lord, increase our faith.”

They are simply overwhelmed with their responsibility after hearing about what they will need to do to please God.

Despite more than 2000 years separating their experience from ours, their appeal would be right at home in our up-sizing, “bigger, better, more” culture of today.

It is all too easy to notice what one lacks rather than to recognize the gifts already received.

Jesus is telling us that we might not need what we think we need.

A bigger bucket of faith is not the answer.

Even the tiniest speck of faith has more power than we have dared yet to call upon.

What we need most is simply this: to get busy doing what we ought to do.

Asking for more faith can be one of our delay tactics—oh, what amazing feats we would accomplish if only God would give us more faith!

In the meantime, we sit back and wait for “it” to happen.

Doing what we ought to do, on the other hand, is for right now, it's for this moment, whatever the condition of our hearts, whatever the quality or capacity of our faith and trust.

Stop and think about this moment in Luke's gospel.

This plea from the disciples, those who are wondering — “can I really do this? “

Because this request, if we are honest, taps into our own doubts, our own fears, our own longings when it comes to wondering, Do I have enough faith to please God?

But then something interesting happens. Because when the disciples recognize their need and ask Him for help, for more faith, you'd think Jesus would both welcome and grant their request.

But He doesn't.

This is Jesus' reply to their request for Him to increase their faith...

### **Luke 17:6**

**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.**

With a twinge of irritation (indicated by the Greek syntax in this verse) He tells them in so many words that they have all the faith they need to do anything.

The tough answer from Jesus might sound surprising.

After all, the apostles have spent more time with Jesus than anyone else, heard more of his teaching than anyone, yet after all the time and

teaching, they still don't seem to have the kind of faith Jesus expects them and wants them to have.

And maybe Jesus' retort was just what they needed – maybe just what we need – to orient us to the miraculous presence of God all around us and the totally sufficient faith they, and we, already have.

This isn't an easy passage is it? Perhaps if we focus on the apostles' request, "increase our faith," that will help.

It's important to note the phrase is not, "Increase my faith."

This is not the cry, plea, or request of an individual; it's the prayer, the desire of the apostles who represent all of us who would follow Jesus.

"Increase our faith." This communal plea is consistent with what Jesus taught the disciples to pray when he told them to say,

"Our Father, who art in heaven...give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, lead us not into temptation ...but deliver us from the evil one."

There is a communal and relational component and nature to being a follower of Jesus that is inescapable.

That is why gathering together on the Lord's day with other believers in fellowship to worship God and all that He has done and is doing is so important.

We're in this life and this thing called faith together with other people whether we like it or not; so we need to work at it together.

We need to exercise it. Forgiveness is one way.

Wherever there are encounters and relationships with people, there will frequently be the need for forgiveness.

Specifically in this context, the apostle's cry for more faith comes immediately after hearing how we need to be people of forgiveness and even more so, that we need to be willing to forgive each other repeatedly.

This doesn't come easily to most people, apparently not even the apostles.

It takes faith to follow Jesus; and He doesn't make it sound easy;

Earlier in Luke's Gospel Jesus described what it means to follow him in tough terms.

To one would-be follower, he cautions that the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

To another who wanted to follow Him but first expressed the need to take care of family matters, He said that they need to keep the kingdom of God as their first priority without wavering or looking back (9:57-62)

To crowds travelling with him, he emphasized the cost of following him:

none can become a disciple without carrying their cross (14:27), placing family ties as secondary (14:26), and giving up all possessions (14:33).

In keeping with these examples of Kingdom priorities, Jesus does not give His disciples an easy answer to their request for more faith.



He basically just says, “look guys, the faith you have is sufficient, you just need to use it and trust Me to do the miraculous work”.

If you read through the Gospel of Luke, those we least expect to have faith are often held up by Jesus as examples of it.

When a woman, a so-called “sinner,” pours ointment on and kisses Jesus’ feet — to the irritation of Pharisees — Jesus not only forgives her sins but also says “your faith has saved you.” (7:50)

He says the same thing to several other folks: a woman who touches him in order to be healed of hemorrhages (3:48),

a Samaritan leper who comes back to thank him after he has been healed (17:19); and a blind beggar who wants to see again (18:42) were all told “your faith has made you well”.

When a Roman centurion goes to great lengths to have Him heal a trusted servant, Jesus exclaims, “Not even in Israel have I found such faith” (7:9).

These folks are in contrast to the disciples who often appear to lack faith, and not just in today’s passage.

When they’re in a boat with Jesus and a storm happens, they get so anxious that Jesus has to ask, “Where is your faith?” (8:25).

To have faith means allowing our whole way of perceiving and responding to life transformed by God.

One biblical scholar states...

“The point is not that the disciples needed more faith, they needed to understand that faith enables God to work in a person’s life in ways that defy ordinary human experience.”

What seems “impossible” for us is “possible” for God.

The point of this scripture is not about being able to do spectacular tricks like making a tree uproot and be planted in the ocean or making a mountain move. These are metaphors.

Rather Jesus is making the point that if we have even a little faith, God can transform how we perceive and respond to the trials and circumstances of life, and He will move mountains.

Then we can live an empowered life according to His teachings and do what we know we should do to please Him.

You see, God gets everyone started off the same way.

He doesn't give one person more faith than He gives another.

Paul says He gives to every man the measure of faith. Then your faith grows according to what you do with it.

A lot of people have done with their faith what the fellow in Matthew's Gospel did with his one talent (see Matthew 25:25).

They've just wrapped their faith up in a napkin, so to speak, and hid it. They haven't used it at all.

It's up to you what you do with the measure of faith God has given you.

The other thing I want you to know is this:

This measure of faith can be increased. But you're the one who increases it, not God.

Certainly, God furnishes the means whereby faith can be increased.

But you increase your faith by doing two things: feeding it on the Word of God and exercising it... putting it into practice.

Just as your body needs both food and exercise in order to be healthy and thrive, so does your faith.

What Jesus says next in answer to the apostle's request for 'more faith' sets the stage for what He says about what it means to be God's servants.

### **Luke 17:7-10**

**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.'**

In the ancient world, a servant was not only a socioeconomic entity that belonged to another but also one who was wholly devoted to their master.

Earlier in Luke's Gospel, Jesus urges us to be watchful servants who are not only responsible in using what has been entrusted to us (12:35-48), but also prudent in generating as much as we can with what we have been given (19:11-27).

Jesus points out now in this scripture that a master simply expects a servant to do his duty.

Jesus is reminding the apostles and all of us of God's authority and our dependence.

God owes us nothing; we owe God everything.

God blesses us with a beautiful world, the gift of life, and everything that we enjoy.

God has been so generous to us, we are blessed to belong to the Lord.

God gives us life, salvation, the ability to do all we can do; we owe God our diligent, faithful, service in return.

If the landowner in the parable can expect the total commitment of his slave, how much more right has God to expect the service of his children?

The Apostle Paul says this.

**Romans 12:1**

**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.**

If having “faith” — even faith the size of a mustard seed — means having one’s thoughts, feelings, and actions wholly transformed by God, then it also means being a “servant” of God: one devoted to God’s purposes in the world.

This scripture is a reminder to us that when we feel that we are doing more than our share, in our jobs, in the home, in the work of the church...

That this point never comes, says Jesus, for you have only done your duty.

How many of you have refrigerator magnets or a framed needle point or a screensaver with a Bible verse in your home?

“God is love” “The Lord is my Shepherd” “The Joy of the Lord is my strength,”

these verses all sound a little nicer to us than:

“So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.””

Yet if we take these apparently harsh words to heart and live by them, we find that by the strange alchemy of God’s providence...

Living diligently in His service turns out to be our perfect freedom.

It is in the serving each other and its resultant joy that we see that God truly is a rewarder of our diligence.

As disciples we can do what God requires through faith, we may not need our faith to increase as much as we think, it may be that we only need to exercise and use the faith we already have.

When we do use the faith we have, we will find that it increases.

Faithfulness, forgiveness, and humility are required of those of us who follow Jesus, but no matter how much we may feel we’re doing for our Master, how much we may think we do for Him, we can never do more than is required.

That is only our reasonable service.

Let’s Pray.