

The Rev. Charlie Holt:

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank You so much for the gift of Your Word and the calling to be people who live in both spirit and in truth, to be accountable to one another and to be people of faith and faithfulness. So we ask that You would increase our faith, Lord, and help us to be a people that walk according to Your ways and Your will. And we bless You in Jesus' name.

Please increase our faith. That was what the disciples exclaimed, "Increase our faith." And it just kind of... The reading started there, and you have to wonder, well, what was it that made them say that? Why would they exclaim to Jesus, "Increase our faith"? He must have said something to them, or there must have been some experience that they had had right before that, that made them exclaim, "Increase our faith."

And so one of the things that I want to do is just back up a little bit in our gospel passage from what was read and ask that question, "Why did they say that? Increase our faith." So this is chapter 17 of the Gospel of Luke, and I'm going to pick up at verse 1.

And he said to his disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come.

It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.

Pay attention to yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and he turns to you seven times saying, "I repent," you must forgive him.

Increase our faith.

That's what led to that exclamation, is Jesus challenging the disciples to be people that were paying attention to the sin in their own life and also holding one another accountable to being people of godliness, to being very careful about their stewardship of influence and making sure that by their own teachings and behavior they weren't leading any of God's little ones astray.

And then when a brother or sister needs grace and forgiveness, offering it to them again and again and again.

I rekindled a relationship that I had with a pastor that I've known, actually, since I was in seminary, Raleigh B. Washington, Dr. Raleigh B. Washington. He was the pastor when I was in seminary of an inner-city church in Chicago called Rock of our Salvation Evangelical Free Church, which was a dynamic congregation right in the heart of the inner city and what you would call the projects, these massive high rises filled with people that were living on government subsidies and in poverty. It was a very challenging place to have a church and a ministry, and yet his church was thriving, it was booming, it was filled with people, and he would every year do a revival meeting called Harvest.

And so my roommate and I went to work one of the Harvest revival meetings, and we were walking down the street, inviting people. We had flyers that we were passing out, and my roommate, his name was Clay Townsend, had a big, muscle guy with a long ponytail.

When we were walking down the street, people would make fun of me, and they would say about him, "Hey, that looks like Steven Seagal. Do you remember Steven Seagal, big muscle movie star?" And then they'd look at me, and they were a little Opie Cunningham.

Who are you with, Steven?

But we came up on a few guys that were in the middle of a drug deal, and I've told you this story before, but they were saying to us, "You don't want any part of this." And of course I agreed with them. I said, "I don't want any part of it." And one of the guys said, "No, I want to hear what they have to say." And so the guy pulled out, my roommate, pulled out his Bible to Isaiah, and he turned to a verse that says, "Your iniquities have separated you from God."

And a man says, "What does that word, iniquities, mean?"

And my friend just, I think it was the Holy Spirit coming out of his mouth. He says, "Those are the things that your mother told you not to do that you're doing right now."

In no lie, this guy fell on his knees in the middle of the street and repented of his sins

and asked Jesus to come into his heart while we were talking to him. It was unbelievable. I've never seen anything like it, where somebody, just by one passage of Scripture, was deeply convicted of his own sin and then repented.

Raleigh Washington was seeing that kind of fruit happen in the lives of the people of his church. I later got reacquainted with Raleigh Washington later after Trayvon Martin was shot a mile away from our church in Lake Mary. We were the closest congregation to the shooting of Trayvon Martin, and there were a lot of meetings and gatherings of clergy across the racial divides and spectrums and different denominations. And we were meeting and we were praying for our city and for the town, and Raleigh Washington at that time had become the president of Promise Keepers, and he wanted to come and see what was going on in Sanford and be of help and encouragement to us. And then now he has moved to Jacksonville. So I went to lunch with him the other day, and he has a new book, and his book is called "One Word, The Cure for Hurt, Hatred, and Hostility."

So that's a good name for a good title for a book, "One Word, The Cure for Hurt, Hatred, and Hostility." And he asked me, he says, "Well, what do you think the one word is?"

Any ideas?"

I mean, the word that came to my mind was Jesus, right? What do you think? What's the one word, Billy? Got any ideas?

Love. Love, okay. Lila? Jesus? Okay. Everybody's going with the easy ones. What Raleigh said is the one word is relationships.

Relationships.

And this is really what Jesus is getting at, is that what the Lord wants to see in our lives is, yes, that we would be saved in the sense of putting our faith in Jesus and giving our lives to Him and receiving His grace and His forgiveness so that we can be in a reconciled relationship with God. That's the big picture of why Jesus came is to save us. But an aspect of our salvation is that we would actually be transformed into His character and His likeness.

In other words, He doesn't leave us in the state of sin and death that He discovers us and calls us out of, but He wants to save us not just to Himself, but also save us from ourselves, to save us from the bondage of the sin nature and from evil and from all the corruption that is in this world and bring us actually into a transformed life that is manifesting His fruit of His character, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And so this process of transformation is called sanctification, and it's one of the purposes of the Christian life. It's one of the main things that God is doing in our life. And the mechanism, and this is what Raleigh-Washington is getting at, the mechanism that God brings about the kind of transformation that can cure, hurt, hatred, and hostility in our life

is the relationships that we have with one another.

And on one level, it's just paying attention to ourselves, recognizing that we all are going to have occasions to sin.

That's what He starts with. He says, "We all can fall into scandal," is the word, Greek word is scandalos. We can all be prone to stumble and fall.

But then He says, "But woe to the one who causes the scandal." In other words, it's one thing to yourself fall into sin, but every single one of us is an example to other people.

You're always being watched. You're an influencer. You know, that's a term that's popular in our day and age. I actually read an interesting article recently about the young generation, I think they call them Gen Z. Is that the generation next generation, Gen Z? And they're demotivated from working.

And one of the main reasons why they're demotivated from working is because of social media influencers. They spend a lot of time watching all of these people who just put up on their Instagram and so on pages what they ate for breakfast and, you know, what they're interested in and what books they're reading and where they're traveling and their new, brand new outfit and so on. And they're making all this money just influencing people by showing what they're doing in life on video.

And so what that's communicating to those that are following them is that all you have to do is just buy some fancy clothes and eat good food, and live, and you will be fine.

And it doesn't convey hard work and discipline and character development and all the things that are necessary to actually be a fruitful person in life.

And the concern is, and this is what Jesus is saying is, be careful if you're an influencer

of how you are influencing other people, because it would be better for you to have a millstone tied around your neck than to cause one of these little ones of God to sin.

So the first place of accountability is holding ourselves accountable.

But then Jesus goes on to say, "We also need to hold each other accountable, that if you see your brother or your sister falling into sin and engaged with something that isn't helpful for their life or being a bad influence, then it's your responsibility to be the voice of truth in their life and to hold your brother or sister accountable.

And that doesn't mean that your job is to condemn them.

We're not to do that. We're not to be judgmental and to be hateful and hurtful in the way that we communicate.

But we are to try to win our brother and sister back to God and to the Lord.

By speaking the truth in love, which is one of the hardest things to do in the world.

"Increase our faith," the disciples said.

You know, we have to be a people that, in our relationships, bring about the transformation,

but we're just the mechanism. We're not the real power, the means by which that happens.

We don't have the power in and of ourselves to change another person's heart or to help their life become better. Ultimately, it will only come miraculously by the power of the Holy Spirit. I remember when I first learned this, myself personally, when I was, Ä¶this was when I was in college. Again, I've told you a lot of stories I'm going to keep telling you. I'm sorry. I'm hoping to be here for a long time. You're going to hear these stories like maybe 20 or 30 times before I'm done. But when I was in college, I was in the fraternity house, and I was really struggling with my sin of alcoholism.

And I remember every time I would go and be around Christian people, I would feel deeply convicted. And that's the Holy Spirit that does that, that's in your heart. And you know that you're not doing right, and you want to do what's right. And so one night I was reading in Paul's letter to the Romans, Romans chapter 7, where it says, "I know what is right from the commandment, and yet I can't do it. I want to do what's right, but the evil I don't want to do, this is what I keep on doing." And as I'm reading this, I'm like, "Boy, Paul, you really understand me. You know, you understand what I'm struggling with. I want to do what's right, but I can't do it." And then he ends that chapter, and he says, "Oh, what a wretch I am.

Who will rescue me from this body of sin and death?" And then he says this, and this is what changed my life, actually, "Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ our Lord. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for the law of the Spirit

sets me free from the law of sin and death."

And that's what I needed. I needed the grace of God that was available to me in the church and with the people of God, as they were people who were living a Christian life. They were being good examples, and it was convicting me to be around their holy lives.

But I also experienced from them the grace of God that was miraculously shining through them as a,Ä¶ of the Holy Spirit. No condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Forgiveness, love. That's where Jesus says, you know, "If they come to you and ask repentance seven times in a day, forgive them seven times."

That's only,Ä¶ that's miraculous forgiveness.

But then he says the law of the Spirit sets you free from the law of sin and death, and there's this indwelling power of God to root out sin out of our hearts and out of our lives.

Jesus said, "All you really need is just the faith of a mustard seed." Why? Because it's God's power that will work in your heart and in your life, to where if you say to a mulberry tree, "Be uprooted," it will uproot itself and go into the sea. Now remember, He's using a metaphor there for the rootedness of corruption and sin in our hearts and in our lives and in our relationships with one another. And He says, "The power is in God."

Yes, you pray, "Increase my faith, Lord. I need Your help here with this."

And He says, "You have it.

One little bit of faith on your part of crying out to God, and the Holy Spirit will rush in and root out that evil out of your heart and out of your life if you will call out to Him."

It's wonderful.

Then He goes on to say something that it sounds a little harsh about the servant, and, you know, coming in and having to continue to be a servant.

And at the end of the day, He doesn't get any attaboys. He just gets told, you know, "You're just doing what you were supposed to do." And Jesus is really getting at the fact that this kind of work that we're called to do, the relational work of the church, and holding each other accountable and forgiving each other and manifesting the Spirit in our life, the work of transformation, this is just the usual fare for the Christian life.

I remember I was pulled over in Lake Mary by a police officer, and she comes up to the window, my daughter's in the car laughing that I got pulled over.

And the officer comes to the car, and she goes, "Father Charlie?" And I'm like, "Yeah?"

This was a member of my church.

She's like, "I gotcha!"

She was so excited that she pulled me over. She's like, "Do you know what you were doing?" I'm like, "I have no idea." And she goes, "Well, your little sticker on the back of your license plate is expired."

And I argued with her. I said, "No, it's not. My birthday's in May, and it says May. It's still May." She goes, "Yeah, but we're past your birthday, and it expired the day after your birthday."

Your license tag has expired.

You're breaking the law, and I gotcha."

She's like, "I'm not going to write you a ticket. I'm just messing with you, but you do need to put your sticker on there."

I went home and put my sticker on there. You know, I drove around Lake Mary for that entire year, and I never got pulled over one more time and received one bit of thank you for putting that sticker on there.

Why?

Because I'm just doing what I'm supposed to do.

No policeman pulled me over and said, "Good job on following the speed limit.

You did an excellent job stopping for that stop sign. Well done.

Never an attaboy."

And this is what Jesus is getting at. It is basically our Christian responsibility to live the Christian life as Christians.

We are called to deal with the sin in our lives and in our relationships. That is just basic, fundamental Christian personal responsibility in our life.

And is it hard?

Yeah, it's hard.

Increase our faith, Lord.

But God gives us the help that we need through His grace and His forgiveness and through the transformational and dwelling power of His Holy Spirit.