

The Rev. Charlie Holt:

Let us pray, Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your word and the call to be transformed by the indwelling power of your Holy Spirit. We ask that the ministry and preaching of your word might be your word for the sake and glory of your Son, Jesus. In His name we pray. Amen.

So the disciples exclaim out, "Increase our faith. Increase our faith."

So when you see that, you kind of have to wonder, "Well, what made them say that?" Why did they say, "Increase our faith like that?" They must have heard something from Jesus or seen something from Him that made them say that. And so one of the problems with where we started the reading of the gospel is we started with the exclamation, but we didn't read the part that was before it that made them say that. Increase our faith. So what made them say it? So let me back up a little bit, and I'll read a little bit ahead of that passage and see what led to such an exclamation.

"Jesus said to His disciples," and if you want to follow along, this is in Luke chapter 17, verse 1, "Jesus 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 the day and turns to you seven times, saying, "I repent," you must forgive him.

"The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith.'"

The challenge that was being presented to them was pretty hard, actually, and it's the hard aspects of the Christian life when it comes to dealing with our own need to be transformed into the image and likeness of Christ.

One of the main aims of the gospel and the Christian life in our lives is to save us. And so God sent His only begotten Son to the end that all who believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. In John 3 16, we all hopefully in here are claiming that promise that if we will trust in Jesus with all of our heart, that our sins will be forgiven and we get to experience eternal life.

But that's not the only aim of the Christian life, is to, in a sense, help us to receive the salvation of eternity.

The goal of the Christian life is actually to save us in the present as well and save us from the bondage and the power of sin in our life and the corruption and the evil that's taking place in this world and become changed, transfigured, transformed, as the word is, metanoia in the Greek, that we would be literally changed from the inside out from the bondage of the sin nature to the glorious light and the fruit of the Holy Spirit of the living God.

We're in a series that we're talking about. What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit and the Spirit-filled life?

And this is fundamentally what the disciples' cry was, is, "Lord, this sounds like something that is beyond us.

Increase our faith." In other words, "We need Your help because we can't do this."

I have a pastor friend that I've known, actually, for a long time. His name is Dr. Raleigh B. Washington.

When I was in seminary, he was the pastor of a church in Chicago called the Rock of Our Salvation Evangelical Free Church. It was in the inner city of Chicago and the projects, pretty tough neighborhood with a lot of poverty and crime, and difficulties, but that's where he was called to have his ministry, and it was a very fruitful ministry for the Lord. And so my roommate

in seminary and I, my roommate's name was Clay, Clay and I went and did a short-term mission trip to his church. They had an annual revival meeting called Harvest, which was a week-long reach out to the neighborhood, inviting people to give their lives to Jesus. And so my friend Clay and I were walking on the streets in the inner city of Chicago, which is a little scary for a guy like me. My friend thankfully was a big muscle guy, big ponytail, and it was funny, the people on the street called him Stephen Seagal. I don't know if you remember Stephen Seagal, the movie star, the big muscle movie star that was in a lot of action movies. And then they looked at me and they were like, "Oh, there's little Opie Cunningham."

What are you doing with Stephen, Opie?"

But so we were walking around, we had our Bibles and inviting people to the revival meeting. We were following these guys that were in the middle of a drug deal.

And they said, "You want no part of this?" And I was like, "Okay." And one of the guys says, "No, I want to hear what they have to say." And so we walked up to these guys, two of them took off, and the one guy that wanted to hear what we had to say, we invited him to the revival meeting. And my friend Clay pulled out his Bible and turned to the prophet Isaiah. And it was a verse that says, "Your iniquities have separated you from God."

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

And he says, "Those are the things that your mom told you not to do that you're doing right now."

"And no lie, the Holy Spirit convicted this person of his sin, and he fell down on his knees in the middle of the street and gave his life to Jesus and repented."

And this is what Jesus is getting at here with this passage, is he says, "Sin," what he calls "scandal." "Scandalon" is the Greek.

Scandal comes to all of us.

We will all have temptations and things that come along in our life for living in this sinful and fallen world.

which will want to trip us up and take us down and bring us into the pit.

The Greek word for sin, by the way, is *amartia*, which has to do with missing the mark. It's like, you know, you're shooting a bow and arrow, and it goes way off and it doesn't hit the bull's eye, the target.

All of us have sin in our lives as a condition, as well as in our actions, where we miss the mark in our character, and we miss the mark with our behaviors and our thoughts and our attitudes, and our speech.

And what Jesus says is that we are supposed to be accountable for that, that one, we need to recognize that it's going to happen in our lives, that we're going to have sin, and that we need to own it and be responsible for that. Then He says, "But woe to the one who causes another person to sin," who's an influencer

of sin. Now, that word "influencer" is one that's kind of popular these days because of the social media influencers, and there's a bunch of them. They're all online. And I read an article, I think it was in the Wall Street Journal, I can't remember exactly, but it was about influencers and the young generation that's coming up, and how many of them are lacking a work ethic because of social media influencers. And what they see online, and TikTok and Instagram and all the different ones, they see people that are basically posting videos about what they're eating for breakfast and what they're wearing as their new outfit, and basically just documenting their lives and making millions of dollars doing it.

And what it does is it paints a false picture about personal responsibility and hard work and what it takes to actually make it in this world. And so, young people are getting disillusioned because they're buying into the lie of the influencers.

Now, if you can make a million dollars telling people what you ate for breakfast, that's good on you. I mean, that's pretty good.

But most of us can't do that.

Most of us have to have jobs and work and do things that are productive for society, not to say that that's not productive. I'm sure it is, particularly if you're stewarding your influence. This is part of what Jesus is getting at.

If every single one of us has to be accountable to the ways in which we not only behave ourselves, but the ways in which we influence others.

And so, Jesus says you need to be careful because if you are the one that is leading somebody into sin, into scandal, it will not go well for you on Judgment Day. It would be better for you to have a millstone tied around your neck and be thrown into the sea than to experience the accountability that you're going to experience. And as I think about the two options there, you know, millstone being thrown into the ocean or experiencing God's judgment, I don't really care to experience either one of those.

And this is one of the main verses of why I'm very, very careful, actually, about what I teach.

And I recognize that when you're in a position of spiritual leadership, if you are a false teacher, you're teaching heresy or you're teaching immorality as if it's okay, that is a very dangerous thing to do personally for yourself. This is one of the reasons why Paul says to young Timothy, "You need to guard your doctrine and your life very closely so that you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Woe to those who are leading those astray." But then he goes on to say, "So you need to guard yourself, and you also need to rebuke those that are in your life that are falling into sin. You need to hold each other accountable."

But it's not in a judgmental, condescending kind of way where you're condemning other people. You need to do it in such a way that you're trying to win your brother or your sister back to you so that when they have room to

repent and even if they get up and they fall down and they get up and they fall down seven times in one day, he says you need to show them grace and show them the forgiveness and the love of God.

Back to Raleigh, Washington.

So I experienced that with Raleigh, Washington, and then I,Ä¶ he came to Lake Mary, Florida when after Trayvon Martin was shot. Our church, St. Peter's, was one of the closest churches to where Trayvon Martin was shot, and so we were getting other clergy together and spending time together talking about racial issues and trying to make sure that we were all working together and praying together during that time across denominations and the different races and so on. And we were really working on that. And Raleigh, Washington, at that time had become the president of Promise Keepers Ministry, and so he recognized what we were doing and wanted to come to Lake Mary and encourage us clergy. So I got to rekindle the relationship, and now he's actually moved to Jacksonville. And one day, I'd love to have him come speak here. He's a really fascinating guy, but he recently wrote a book, and the name of the book is called

One Word, The Cure for Hurt, Hatred, and Hostility. Sounds like a pretty relevant book these days, doesn't it?

And so he asked me, I went to lunch with him, he says, "So what do you think the one word is?"

It's like it's a trick of his title. One word, the cure for hurt, hatred, and hostility. What do you think the one word is that is the cure for hurt, hatred, and hostility? Sally, you got an idea? Love. Okay, that's a good word. Love.

God.

Jesus. Okay. That was my one word. I threw out Jesus. I figure you can't go wrong with that one.

You know what he said? He says the one word is relationship.

He says that's the cure for hatred, hostility, and hurt.

And in fact, that's exactly what Jesus is saying to his disciples is that we need to be in personal, accountable relationships with one another in order for the Lord to have the mechanisms in our life to transform us.

And when we hear that, the response is, "Increase our faith, Lord."

Really?

You mean we got to be involved in each other's lives and connected and accountable to one another?

This is hard.

That sounds like a lot of work. I mean, can't we just be solo Christians?

And there's nothing in the Scriptures that allows that, solo Christianity, like the young man that came to the old wise Christian mentor, and he says, "You know, I just want to worship by myself, you know, out in nature. I don't need to be part of a Christian community or church."

And the old man was by a fireplace, and he pulled one of those coals out of the fire, and he stuck it up on the mantle, and the coal went from red hot to gray and then black.

And then he grabbed the tongs and he took that coal and he stuck it right back in the midst of the other coals, and all of a sudden it went from gray to orange and on fire again.

And the young guy says, "I get the point."

We have to have one another in each other's lives because it's in the community of the faithful that the Holy Spirit is manifest and burns bright.

And yeah, you can't do it on your own. You can't do it by yourself, and you can't do it in your own power.

Increase our faith.

And the Lord invites us into change and transformation of life, but it doesn't necessarily depend on our own flesh and pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps. And what Jesus says to the disciples is, "Yes, you do need to have some faith here." That is true. You need to call out to God and say, "Lord, we need your help to pull this off."

He says, "But it doesn't require a lot from you. It actually requires more from me."

You can have faith the size of a mustard seed, just a little tiny bit of faith, and my power

will unroot mulberry trees of sin in your life and cast them into the sea.

It's not the size of your faith.

It's the strength of God's power that uproots evil in your life and in your communities and in your families and in your fill-in-the-blank.

I learned this when I was in college at the University of Florida. Thank you, Gators, for at least winning one game this season.

But I was, you know, a junior in college, and I was trying to get free from alcoholism and the wild life of the fraternity system.

And I would go and I would hang out with the Christians, and I would go to Bible studies, and deep inside of me I felt very convicted about my sin. I felt, "Well, these people are so holy, and they've got it all together, and I'm really a sinner, and I'm not doing right." And if they knew the stuff that I know about myself, they wouldn't let me be here. And I felt all of that. And then I'd go hang out with my fraternity brothers, and I would be like, "Woo-hoo!"

It was party time, and I didn't have to worry about any of that.

I've often heard the idea of a seesaw. You know, you have helpful friends and unhelpful friends, and you need to have more helpful friends in your life than you have unhelpful friends, because the unhelpful friends will just drag you right back into the sin.

And so the helpful friends are the ones that are the place where the magic is happening, the Spirit is working in your heart and in your life. And so as I was spending more and more time with the helpful friends, I felt more and more convicted. And I went up to my room in the fraternity house, and I pulled out the Bible. We've been studying Romans, and so Romans chapter 7, "Why do I do the things I do? I want to do what's right, but the evil I don't want to do, that's what I keep on doing." And I felt so convicted that Paul really got it, he understood what I was wrestling with. And then he goes on to say, "Who will rescue me from this body of sin and death? Thanks be to God through Christ Jesus our Lord. There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit sets you free from the law of sin and death."

And the Holy Spirit set me free from alcoholism that day.

And it was amazing.

I got a blank slate and grace, which is what I needed, the forgiveness that Jesus is talking about that comes from the church and the relationships, and also got the truth that I needed to hear from the church and those relationships as well.

But the power of the liberation and the changed life came from the gift of the Holy Spirit that night, which was also something I had heard about from them.

And so, you know, the Lord wants to see this happening in the context of all of our relationships in the life of this church and in all the churches, all of his people. He wants to see us become the transfigured, transformed people of God. And it's hard work. There's not any way to sugarcoat it or make it sound any better. We've got to just be there for each other and be forthright with one another and love each other through it. And, yeah, when you really start thinking about it, you're like, "Oh, gosh, increase my faith."

But know that the power of God is there to uproot the sin out of our lives and take the mulberry bush and throw it into the sea.

But this is just part of what it means to be a Christian. And that's where Jesus kind of lands this plane, is this is just Christian responsibility? This is our duty as Christians is to live this way.

And he says, you know, he tells the story about the servant just doing what he's told to do, and he comes home and he doesn't get any attaboys. He just is, you know, keep serving.

And the way I kind of can put this into modern terms, and I'll end with this story, but there was... In Lake Mary, I got pulled over one day. I had my daughter in the car, and I got pulled over by the police officer. And the police officer comes to the window, and she sees who it is, and she's like, "Ha-ha, Father Charlie, I got you."

And she goes, "You know why I pulled you over?" And I said, "No, I don't really understand." And she said, "Well, that little sticker on your license plate is expired."

And I knew it wasn't, it was May, and my birthday's in May, and it says May, and so I still had a couple more days in the month. And I had it at home, I just hadn't put it on there yet. And she goes, "Well, it expired the day after your birthday, it's actually expired, so you're breaking the law."

And she goes, "Because it's you, I'm not going to write a ticket. What a nice lady." But she says, "You need to put it on there."

And my daughter just thought that was hilarious, that I got pulled over by a member of our church.

But you know, I put that, went home, put the sticker on there. I drove around Lake Mary for a whole year, and I never got pulled over again by any of the police to thank me for putting that sticker on there.

You know, I drove the speed limit all around the town.

Nobody pulled me over and said, "Charlie, I really appreciate you driving the speed limit. Good job."

And I, you know, stopping for that stop sign, there just, no attaboys whatsoever.

Isn't that frustrating? You know, you try to live a good, abiding citizen's life and you never get any attaboys or thanksgivings for that. I think this is kind of what Jesus is saying.

This is just the way the Christians are supposed to live, that we are to be the people that God's calling us to be.

And so, you don't get attaboys for not lying, stealing, murdering, and, you know, worshiping idols and that sort of thing. Like God's going to go, "Good job. You didn't worship any idols today.

Good job. You're the Sabbath today. Good job. You didn't kill anybody today."

That's not the way it works.

We are... That's like basic Christianity, and basic Christianity is living a transformed life.

It's doing what we are supposed to do, and yes, that is hard.

The Christian life is hard because we live in a sinful and fallen world. But it's hard, but increase our faith. Increase the prayer. Increase our faith.

God's power is there to meet you and to help you to overcome and to win and fight the battle. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank You so much for the gift of Your Word and the call to transformed life. We know that in our power and strength, we are in bondage to sin, and we need Your grace, and we need Your forgiveness, and we need Your blank slate. But You also have given us the power, and so increase our faith, Lord. Maybe that's a prayer that you

might want to pray today just for yourself. Increase my faith that I might experience more of Your Holy Spirit and liberate me from the power of sin in my life, that I might be manifesting the fruit of Your Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.