

Luke 17:1-19

Simple faith in Jesus is what we need to thrive.

I like food so occasionally I will watch other people cook. It is far more entertaining than actually cooking for me! And in so many of the clips I see or shows making exquisite meals, the chef will often say something along the lines of “just a pinch of salt will do!”

If you are in the kitchen enough you might come to learn that the pinch of salt carries the dish. It unlocks the fat, the heat, the flavor of the food.

Life is like cooking in the kitchen. And our salt is faith. How much do we need?

Now, today don't hear what I am not saying. I am not saying “you need less faith.” The sentiment of “more” faith isn't a bad one. But faced with temptations, stumbling blocks, the call to self-discipline, and doling out forgiveness as the way of the Kingdom, it all requires faith, but faith not larger in quantity, but rather grander in quality.

All of what we have covered in the last few weeks flows together.

Journey to Jerusalem. Teaching on the Kingdom, the community it forms, the idols that attempt to ruin it. And how we live, using wealth to win eternal friends.

More of the same here in our text for today. Live starkly different from the abiding culture, and “religious” patterns. You are going to need juice to live like this. Something extra - faith.

Required, resourced, and faithful response.

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Faith is Required for Life

Jesus is always honest. He shoots from the hip and is hip when he shoots. And here with his disciples, he is showing them what life is like.

Luke 17:1 “And he said to his disciples, “Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!” (ESV)

Sin here could also be translated as “stumbling blocks.” Things will get in the way of living before God, temptations away, to miss the mark of how we are called to live, will lure you away from what is best.

Sin: “an immoral act considered to be a transgression against divine law.”

Jesus doesn't want to leave his followers naive. Just as he was tempted to turn from truth in the wilderness, there will be things that try to trip us up throughout life.

That being so, those that tempt are better off dead now than judged later. Little ones being believers, maybe even the disabled, unlikely, outsiders that have come to Jesus.

Pharisees in mind - corrupted teaching, warping the word to their benefit. Using Scripture to say something it is not saying. This is all over the place!

A certain governor of a western state has paid for billboards in other states inviting people to visit for an abortion - quoting Scripture on the love of neighbor as the reason. Woe to you!

Non-believers aside, there are plenty of bad pastors that do this to Scripture week in and week out to facilitate something other than the Kingdom Jesus has announced.

Temptation comes in other ways as well. Sensuality. The permissiveness of our day. And it is all dangerous.

“The human condition makes stumbling blocks inevitable. The destructiveness of sin is seen throughout general culture. Intellectuals often directly assault Christian belief. Criminal offenders regularly lead others headlong into sin. The icons of pop culture lure multitudes away from truth and life. Even some within

the religious culture of faith, pastors and teachers who engage in spiritual compromise, lay huge stumbling blocks before “little ones,” people who are weak and vulnerable as they are being drawn to Christ.” Hughes

In light of this, Jesus says, “Pay attention to yourselves!” Watch your lives, live them unto the Lord, and don’t sin.

Do this in community. If your brother sins, rebuke him. If he repents, forgive.

Even seven times. In this culture, it was seen as honorable to forgive three times. Jesus is taking the Kingdom beyond religious norms. “You must forgive.”

So, we use mammon for others, we welcome in the disabled, the different, we watch out for temptation, for false teaching, and we keep track of each other... with abundant forgiveness. That’s a lot!

We are fine with grace when it is for us, but we are not as keen when it is meant to flow through us.

How can we do it?

Luke 17:5 “The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” (ESV)

Faith is the Resource Jesus gives

The twelve hear of what is required and recognize they will need faith for it. They need something outside of themselves to do what they have been called to do.

Jesus gives in response more mustard seed imagery - “if you had faith like a grain of mustard seed...” That which is small could uproot the most resilient, deeply-rooted, immovable tree.

It’s funny to me, we keep reading this description from Jesus and resolve it’s more faith that we need. So western of us, always needing “more!”

It’s not more we need, it’s faith in the right object that fuels us in life. That helps us live as Kingdom citizens. That defines our hopes, our joy.

In Jesus' response we don't always grasp the point, he is essentially saying, "you don't need increased faith!"

"The apostles came up and said to the Master, "Give us more faith." 6 But the Master said, "You don't need more faith. There is no 'more' or 'less' in faith. If you have a bare kernel of faith, say the size of a poppy seed, you could say to this sycamore tree, 'Go jump in the lake,' and it would do it." **Luke 17:5-6** (MSG)

We need right faith - that sees Jesus for who he is and trusts him as Creator and sustainer of all things.

The more we see him, the bigger Jesus is to us, the more it might "feel" like we have increased faith.

"Jesus' disciples ask him for a good thing—more faith. But Jesus' response shows that it is not the quantity or greatness of our faith that matters, but the object of our faith. That is, if we believe in God's grace and power then even seemingly impossible things can become realities, despite the smallness of our faith ("like a . . . mustard seed"; v. 6). This is good news for our daily Christian lives. God does not base his blessings on whether we can muster up great and powerful or even persistent faith. Rather, we are to look to God's greatness, power, and consistency, believing in him, not ourselves. Such faith in God, rather than in the faith we can generate, is the foundation of spiritual victory and calm in the soul."

The church is in desperate need.

The State of Theology report from Ligonier and Lifeway. Comparing general population of Americans and those that identify as evangelical.

65% of "Evangelicals" agree with the statement: Everyone is born innocent in the eyes of God.

55% agree "Everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature."

When it comes to the object of our faith...

44% agree "Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God."

61% agree that “Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God.” Arianism!

Yet, 94% agree that “Sex outside of traditional marriage is a sin.”

91% agree that “Abortion is a sin.”

A failure to actually disciple people in the way of Jesus, teaching them who he is and what he says, delivers these results. It is, as one writer said, “a consequence of conservative Christians prioritizing “culture war” over orthodox doctrine.”

What we need is not an increase but a solidifying.

C.S. Lewis in the Great Divorce uses this imagery of souls wandering in what is hell rather than going into eternity in heaven. When they do they become solid.

Our faith solidifies the more we see Jesus. In the word. In community. The more he is the hero of our stories. Of our teaching. Of our preaching. He is the reason not just for the season, but for hope, love of neighbor, steadfastness before the stumbling blocks of the world.

And he gives this solid faith.

There is always more to Jesus than you have right now. This is what we go after!

The Apostles understood that faith is a gift. That’s why they ask, even if imperfectly.

We need to know this as well.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (**Ephesians 2:8, 9**).

Hebrews 12:2a “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith...”(ESV)

Peter and John healing a man and preaching in the Temple. **Acts 3:16** “And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. (ESV)

Our lives are different, lived for him, **Philippians 1:29** “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him...”(ESV)

2 Peter 1:1–2 “...To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” (ESV)

What does this faith - this gift hold - that God himself, Jesus comes and takes on flesh and lives among us, facing all that we face, the stumbling blocks, yet is without sin, obedient to the Father. And in his innocence, he gives up his life for us. To be an atoning sacrifice for our sin - to give us his righteousness, his salvation. And when we have that, everything changes.

The farthest off are invited home. Those without are welcomed in. Made sons and daughters of God. Citizens of his Kingdom. Those without money are given extravagant blessings without price.

“Help me to see you as you are Jesus!” I believe, help my unbelief.

If you have never felt like you have had this - a saving faith - ask for it now.

If you have been putting faith in the wrong object, turn, repents, ask for this faith now.

Simple faith in Jesus is what we need to thrive.

It's required. It's resourced.

Faithful Response to the Gift

What follows in our text is some comparison and interaction that immediately gives an example of what a faithful response to faith looks like. Not glamorous!

Unworthy Servants. Jesus tells them that they wouldn't commend a servant for doing their duty. Disciples are not to expect differently. Yes, this is a direct way of putting it, but we all are unworthy servants. Called to do our duty without fame.

There must have been some inclination to rise above the rest in terms of spiritualism. We get it, we can see a desire for "god-status" for ourselves. This is why cults are appealing, why the serpent lured Adam and Eve to the fruit.

We though, are to have a humble posture. I watched myself, rebuked and forgave my brother, "I am unworthy of this grace!"

Also, we are to have a posture of praise.

Jesus meets ten lepers coming into a village on his way. This is a community formed around their unworthiness. Jews and one Samaritan. Each with a skin condition that made them "unclean."

Jesus doesn't touch them, as he has before, but in response to their cries for mercy he tells them to "go show yourselves to the priests." Go and verify your ceremonial cleanness.

"And as they went they were cleansed."

Luke 17:15–16 "Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; [16] and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan." (ESV)

Praising God. At Jesus' feet giving thanks.

A life forever changed, responding with praise.

A Samaritan. The guy with bad theology. Despised for where he was born.

He got it right.

Luke 17:17–19 “Then Jesus answered, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? [18] Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” [19] And he said to him, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.” (ESV)

“Vague gratitude to divinity was not an adequate response to what had happened. Christ wanted their hearts! By failing to glorify God and returning to thank Jesus, they missed the greatest possible moment of their existence.” Kent Hughes

This is essentially our story. In our sin and faithlessness, Jesus makes us clean. His work for us. His place for us. Now his Kingdom lived in us.

When faith in Jesus is given to us, humble praise is what we bring. Not to gain greater faith, or illicit some approval, but because we have been forgiven and called his. Because we feel it in our bones.

He gets us through, he makes us clean, he calls us his own.

Simple faith in Jesus is what we need to thrive.

It's what we need to face temptation, to rebuke and forgive brothers and sisters. It's what we need to live out our duty as citizens of heaven. And it's what we need to live in response with praise.

In the 1950's there was a men's hair product called Brylcreem... "Brylcreem, a little dab'll do ya; Brylcreem, you'll look so debonair. Brylcreem, the gals'll all pursue ya; they'll love to get their fingers in your hair!"

Faith is the same... without the debonair maybe... a little dab'll do ya.

We just a pinch of this salt for life.

Ask for a clearer vision of who Jesus is. To see him bigger, to have faith in him alone.

“As we concentrate on growing in our reverence and awe for [Jesus] and in our understanding of His love for us, we will find that our desire for Him will grow. As we gaze upon His beauty, we'll desire to seek Him even more.” Jerry Bridges

Rest in him. He will keep you come what may. Every stumbling block is no match for his grace and forgiveness.

Live to thank him. Let his grace sustain you and flow to others through you.
Psalm 103:2 “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,” (ESV)

Faith in Jesus is good. It is the only good. And it is yours by grace.

Rise and go!