

Sermon Series: **POWERfull**

Sermon Title: **POWERfull Faith**

By: *Neil Silverberg*

Sermon Text: **Luke 17:1-6**

I found this definition of faith by one of the most popular faith teachers in the Word of Faith movement. He is commenting on Heb. 11:1 which the KJV says "Faith is the *substance* of things hoped for." He says:

"Faith is a power force. It is a tangible force. It is a conductive force. Moreover, faith is a spiritual force....It is substance. Faith has the ability to effect natural substance. As the force of gravity...makes the law of gravity work...this force of faith...makes the laws of the spirit world function."

This teacher went on to affirm that:

"God cannot do anything for you apart or separate from faith, for faith is God's source of power. Moreover, everything that you're able to see or touch, anything that you can feel, anything that's perceptible to the five physical senses, was originally the faith of God, and was born in the substance of God's faith. In other words, faith was the raw material substance that the Spirit of God used to form the universe."

He adds that "*God used words when He created the heaven and the earth....Each time God spoke, He released His faith -- the creative power to bring His words to pass. For words are spiritual containers, and the force of faith is released by words.*" Notice how this teacher sees the word "substance" in Heb. 11:1. He sees it as a transcendent element that makes up the universe and that was and is activated by spoken words at the onset of creation. This definition of faith is not the biblical meaning of faith. This definition comes right out of the world of metaphysics.

Hank Hannegraff in an article entitled *What's Wrong with the Faith Movement* stated the following:

"Over a century before the Faith movement became a powerful force within the Christian church, Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802-1866), the father of New Thought, was popularizing the notion that sickness and suffering ultimately have their origin in incorrect thinking. Quimby's followers held that man could create his own reality through the power of positive affirmation (confession). Metaphysical practitioners have long taught adherents to visualize health and wealth, and then to affirm or confess them with their mouths so that the intangible images may be transformed into tangible realities. Although proponents of Faith theology have attempted to sanitize the metaphysical concept of the "power of mind" by substituting in its stead the "force of faith," for all practical purposes they have made a distinction without a difference."

Faith is not actual *substance* or physical matter as the Faith teachers proclaim. The word *substance* in Heb. 11:1 is the Greek word "*hypostasis*" which is perhaps best translated by the English word "*assurance*". That's why the NIV translates that word as "being sure" and the NAS as "assurance". Far from being some tangible material or energetic force, faith is a channel of living trust stretching from man to God. Faith therefore is a *conviction* that certain things

are true, even if I can't see them. It is an assurance that God's promises never fail, even if sometimes we do not experience their fulfillment during our mortal existence.

The Nature of Faith

It is vital therefore that we understand the nature of true faith. That is why in this installment of our series **POWERfull** we are dealing with **PowerFULL Faith**. In his training of the twelve apostles, Jesus was always seeking to encourage the faith of his apostles. In our text before us Jesus is instructing them about stumbling blocks and how to avoid becoming one to others, especially children. He not only tells them how serious the judgment is for those who become stumbling blocks, but also how to handle those who seek to cause us to stumble. They are to rebuke him in person and if he repents, they are to forgive him. I believe the rabbinic rule was you were to forgive him up to four times a day. Jesus goes beyond that and says that their forgiveness should know no bounds (up to seven times a day).

The apostles are so overwhelmed by this instruction that their forgiveness should know no bounds that they ask the Lord, "Increase our faith." Notice that. We would think that they would have asked the Lord, "Increase our love" but they didn't. Rather, they felt the need for an increase in their faith. In the Lord's response he corrects their thinking. *They actually don't need their faith increased as much as they need to understand the nature of true faith.* There are three things we learn about faith in the apostles' request and our Lord's response: (1) ***we need faith to obey our Lord's commands***, (2) ***it is not a matter of how much faith we have but Who it is in***, and (3) ***faith links us to the mighty power of God.***

Faith empowers us to live a life of obedience (vs. 5)

The apostles rightly felt their need of more *faith* if they were to be able to carry out our Lord's commands regarding forgiveness. Underneath their request is the realization that behind a life of obedience must be a solid, unshakeable faith. **That's because faith is the root from which all the other graces grow.** Paul much later said it this way: "*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love*" (Gal. 5:6). Spurgeon said that faith is the root-grace; all the other virtues and graces spring from it. He said,

"Tell me of love; how can I love him in whom I do not believe. If I do not believe that there is a God, and that he is the rewarder of all them that diligently seek him, how can I possibly love him? Tell me of patience: how can I exercise patience unless I have faith? For faith looks to the recompense of the reward: she says, that "all things are working together for our good," she believes that from our distresses the greater glory shall spring, and therefore she can endure. Tell me of courage: but who can have courage if he has not faith? Take what virtue you will, and you will see that it depends on faith. Faith is the silver thread upon which the pearls of the graces are to be strung. Break that, and you have broken the string—the pearls lie scattered on the ground, nor can you wear them for your own adornment. Faith is the mother of virtues. Faith is the fire which consumes the sacrifice. Faith is the water which nurtures the root. Faith is the sap which imparts vitality to all the branches. If you have not faith all your graces must die. And in proportion as your faith increases so will all your virtues, not all in the same proportion, but all in some degree. The man of little faith is the man of little love. The man of great faith is the man of great affection."

There are three things in God's Word that are called precious and one of them is *faith* (the precious blood of Christ, the precious promises of God and 'like precious faith'). Why is faith so precious? *Because it was given to us by Christ Jesus Himself. "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake".* And Peter said he was writing his second letter to "*those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours*". The word *obtained* in this text means to "have something assigned to a person" or to "receive". We have "received" from God this faith that we have in Jesus. When did we receive it? We received it *when we were born again by the Spirit of God*. How else could you believe and surrender your entire life to a crucified Galilean who lived two thousand years ago whom you have never seen and apart from any evidence, you now believe God raised from the dead and seated on the throne of the universe? You didn't just decide to believe that because it sounded reasonable; (it's the most unreasonable thing you ever heard).

Yet now, you not only believe in Him, you actually love Him (though you have never seen Him.) And you live your whole life to please Him because you are convinced that He is exactly who he said he is. The proof that you now believe is that you now *obey* Him. Do you remember the struggle you had before you believed in trying to do that which is good? You summed up all of your will power to try to overcome a besetting sin but it was all to no avail. Then, you were born again, and came to faith in the Gospel and your heart was awakened to righteousness. Charles Wesley sang about it long ago:

"Long my imprisoned spirit lay, Fast bound in sin and nature's night; Thine eye diffused a quickening ray; I woke, the dungeon flamed with light; My chains fell off, my heart was free; I rose, went forth, and followed thee."

Paul described it this way: "*But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness*" (Rom. 6:17-18). Now that you have been regenerated, you love righteousness and hate wickedness (if you don't it's because you are not born again).

It's not a matter of how much faith we have but *Who* it is in!

The second thing we learn about faith in this passage is that it is not a matter of how much faith we have but Who it is in that matters most. The apostles had asked the Lord to "*Increase our faith.*" They acutely felt their need for more faith. *Jesus doesn't tell them that they need more faith but rather that they need to recognize the Object of their faith.* Faith has been compared to the eye; I am not aware of how I am seeing but only conscious of *what* I am seeing. So it is with faith. **It is only conscious of the one it believes in—it is unconscious of itself.**

Remember how Jesus compared faith in Him to the Old Testament event of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness in John 3? Israel rebelled again against the Lord and He sent fiery serpents into their midst to punish them. Moses cried out to the Lord and the Lord told him the way of deliverance. They were to make a serpent out of bronze and lift it up on a pole. And God said that "whoever gazed upon the serpent" would be healed. Jesus says that is exactly how He saves people as well. "*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.*"

Here, Jesus compares *believing* to *gazing*. Faith has been called the *eye* of the soul. So here is the question: “What am I gazing at? Am I gazing at Jesus Who has been lifted up for me or am I gazing at myself? (How little my faith is, how little my devotion is, how deep my struggles are). It’s not how much faith I have that matters but Who it is in.

Jesus illustrates this by telling a parable to illustrate that even little faith is powerful. He says if you have faith as a mustard seed it is mighty. Why the mustard seed? Jesus answered that in the Parable of the Mustard Seed in Mt. 13:32. He called the mustard seed “*the smallest of the seeds*”. Even though it is almost invisible, it grows into a large tree. That was what the kingdom of God looked like at that time. Jesus and twelve guys seemed to be nothing compared to the mighty Roman Empire but eventually the Roman Empire would submit to the kingdom of God. So the faith teacher was wrong. Faith isn’t a ‘power force that controls the universe’; *God is the Power Source which controls all things*.

Stop looking at how much faith you have and start looking at the Mighty Powerful God whom your faith is in. Fill your hearts and minds with thoughts about your Great Jehovah; meditate upon his great and precious promises. It’s not the quantity of your faith which matters but the *quality* of your faith that counts most. Preach the Gospel to yourself continually; remind yourself often of Who Jesus is and what He has promised you. Build yourself up by your most holy faith. “*Faith is the assurance of things hoped for.*” Be assured that God is real, that Jesus Christ is exactly Who he said he is and that he now rules all things in the interest of his Father. Be assured that everything He promised is true and that we can bank our lives on it.

Faith links believers to the mighty power of God

Jesus said that “*If you had faith like a grain of a mustard seed you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.*” The parallel to this where he said something similar is in Matthew 17. Jesus had just appeared in his glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. When he came down, a man approached him whose son was demon-possessed. While the Lord was on the Mount the disciples had tried to cast the spirit out but it wouldn’t come out. Jesus immediately cast the spirit out and it left him. Then, when they were in private, they asked Him why they couldn’t cast it out. Jesus told them again it was because of their little faith and that all they needed was faith like a grain of a mustard seed.

There, Jesus said you could say to a mountain “*Move from here to there*” and it would obey you.” That same faith teacher I quoted at the beginning of this message explains why we can now do things like that. He states that before the fall, humans had the potential to call things into existence by using the faith-force. After the fall, humans took on Satan’s nature and lost the ability to call things into existence. In order to correct this situation, Jesus Christ gave up His divinity and became a man, died spiritually, took Satan’s nature upon Himself, went to hell, was born again, and rose from the dead with God’s nature. After this, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to replicate the Incarnation in believers so they could become little gods as God had originally intended. Now, because of what Jesus did, we are little gods and can tap into the faith-force and call things into existence. That is not what Jesus is teaching here folks. That comes right out of the world of metaphysics. That is actually “faith in faith” as some powerful force.

Jesus is teaching that faith in itself is not a powerful force but links us to the Almighty God with whom nothing is impossible. The writer of Hebrews tells us what mighty things God has done in the past for those who believed Him: “*And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel*

and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection” (Heb. 11:32-35).

All of these witnesses had convictions about Who God is, what he had called them to do, and that he was with them in it. Sometimes, God worked mightily in the past for those who trust him so that significant miracles took place. The Bible is full of the miraculous such as healings, resurrections, shutting lion’s mouths, being supernaturally strengthened. God does those things at times to confirm his word (we believe those things still happen today). But the writer also tells of others who did not receive a miracle. What would be our response? They didn’t have faith, right? But the writer doesn’t say that. Listen:

Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Heb. 11:35-40

These men and women had faith as well, even though they had negative things happen to them. What is the takeaway from this? Let’s abandon the idea that faith is a force that we control by the use of our tongue. Let’s accept the biblical view faith is unconscious of itself but only conscious of the Mighty One. Let’s repent of our unbelief. Hebrews calls it an "evil heart of unbelief".

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The questions below are for House Church Group Discussion.

- 1) What's wrong with many of the definitions regarding what faith is as taught by many modern Word of Faith teachers?
- 2) Why did the apostles ask the Lord to increase their faith in Luke 17:5?
- 3) How did the Lord respond to their request?
- 4) Why is faith the root of all the other graces and virtues?
- 5) How is faith God's gift to us? When did we receive it?
- 6) How did Jesus teach that it was not so much how 'much' faith we have but Who it is in that matters most?
- 7) Why did Jesus teach this in comparing faith to a grain of mustard seed?

8) What does the writer of Hebrews teach about the true nature of faith in Hebrews 11:32-40?