

Lord Increase our Faith

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 October 2021

Preacher: Malcolm Macdonald

[0 : 00] We can sing now to God's praise again singing from Psalm 31, Psalm 31 and at verse 19.
Amen.

Thanks be to the Lord, for he hath magnified his wondrous love to me within, a city
fortified. For from thine eyes cut off I am.

I in my haste hath said, my voice yet heard, sir, when to thee with Christ my moan I made.
O love the Lord, all ye who have saints, because the Lord doth guard the faithful, and he
plenteously proud doers doth reward.

Be of good courage, and he strength unto your heart shall send. All ye whose hope and
confidence doth on the Lord depend. We can sing these verses from verse 19 to the end.

[1 : 33] How great's the goodness thou for them that fear thee keep'st in store. O great the
goodness thou for them that fear thee keep'st in store.

And what for them thou trust in thee, the sons of men behold.

In secret of thy presence thou shalt tide them from man's pride.

From strife on town's love closely shout, as in a gent and high.

O great the goodness thou for them that fear thee keep'st in store.

[3 : 09] For from thine eyes cut off I am, I in my hips ascend.

My voice yet heard, sir, when to thee with Christ my moan I made.

For love the Lord, all ye who have saints, because the Lord doth guard the faithful, thee
more of thee, yes, you may need.

And tuiniest thou for us who chiefs thee keep'mt in store. Be of good courage andatever
he can have.

his end unto your conscience and all ye who sow and confidence doth the glory end we
can turn for a short while to consider words we find in the passage read Luke chapter 17
we can read again at verse 5 and the apostles said unto the Lord increase our faith
increase our faith Lord increase our faith does it not sound like a reasonable request

[5 : 18] I'm sure you could argue it sounds like a recognisable request and why do I say that well
I'm sure that there are occasions when we find ourselves and we do not consider our faith
to be sufficient we do not consider that our faith is adequate and in that situation we may
come with such a prayer but what exactly are we looking for do we want a purer faith do
we want a stronger faith a more dynamic faith what is it that we want from God if we ask
him to increase our faith in the writings of Octavius

Winslow one of his books has the name personal declension and revival of religion in the soul personal declension and revival of religion in the soul and in that book he looks at various ways in which the Christian can experience declension and one of the areas that he considers is in the area of the Christian's faith now what does the word declension mean I'm sure you know it must I was looking at the meaning of the word declension and in the dictionary it goes immediately to talk about grammar and those of you who were learning grammar in school if you were learning Latin then you learned to decline verbs to work your way from a beginning and work your way down but usually what we mean by declension is where something is literally declining in the area of

Christian theology it is usually applied to the the passions going back the passions not progressing and just lack of progress but deterioration that's probably the best word declension means deterioration so in that sense I think where this theologian considers the topic he is seeing faith deteriorating now that may seem strange may seem strange to us even that faith can deteriorate because our understanding of faith requires us to believe that our faith is something that will endure regardless and if we look at the way the faith is treated experientially in the life of the believer at its very heart is this that it focuses on what the believer has come to put their trust in they've come to trust in

God in the passion of his son Jesus Christ and that through the gospel and Donald McLeod for example an example of a theologian says it is an intellectual commitment wherein the mind is submissive to the truth of the gospel and that of course is expanded to every area that the gospel touches on the things that are true about God the things that are true about man the things that are true about redemption or salvation as it is fulfilled by Christ and so on but it is belief in the whole truth nothing but the truth of the gospel and the passion who has come to this place then surely they cannot depart from it the word of

God encourages the believer to understand that once they have come to this place that they cannot depart from it one of the I'm sure we're all familiar with the Shorter Catechism one of the commentators on the Shorter Catechism may be a contributor to the confession of faith a man called James Fisher he was a contemporary of two well known preachers of the 15th century Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine and he has a very comprehensive commentary on the Shorter Catechism it's still I don't know if it's still available or not if it was ever reprinted but he he said this and I'm going to quote what he said faith being the gifted hand that is stretched out to receive Christ in the promise cannot but be inseparable but inseparable connected with salvation because

[11 : 47] Christ whom faith receives is the all of our salvation hence is that promise he that believes shall be saved now if you understand that and if you believe that this man in a very comprehensive study of what the shorter catechism teaches he goes for example the question what is faith he expounds it very exhaustively and he comes up with this statement which is very helpful to the believer in understanding what they are doing when they put their trust in Christ and if that is true of the believer how then is this petition a wise petition how is this petition Lord in Christian faith a petition that is both meaningful practical even essential how can

Christ be more received than he already is through the gifted hand of faith as Fisher puts it Jesus has said often to the disciples and to others that they they must expect of themselves very high standards because of God's graces that he endows them with they are not minor graces they are not meaningless graces they are graces that allow them to live the life of faith in a way that is pleasing to God beneficial to themselves and a great advantage to those who see it being outlived by them in the world now in this passage before we say anything else there are two things that are highlighted

I suppose that need to be understood with regard to this specific request the request is increase our faith Lord and at the beginning of the chapter he deals with this sin of causing others to stumble and the actual Greek word that is used by him or that we find here is the word scandalous or scandal and you recognize the word I'm sure instantly because it is the word Greek word from which the word scandal comes so Jesus is there stating that woe will befall those who are guilty of causing others to sin it is when they are responsible for scandalizing the church through their activity and the second thing that he mentions is the need for a forgiving spirit where there is genuine repentance he emphasizes it to our embarrassment even because he tells us if your brother trespass against the rebuke him and if you repent forgive him and it really points or tests the forgiving spirit that ought to inhabit our breast how ready are we to forgive no it's not forgive at any costs but it's forgiveness if there is a readiness to repent but the opportunity to allow repentance is there so that if we're offended by a brother then if that brother is prepared to repent then we forgive

R.C. Sproul the commentator writes we are to rebuke an ailing brother in order to bring them to repentance and if repentance is there we must forgive but then he goes on to say if a person says he is sorry even if he is insincere we are required to forgive him if his apology is not genuine that is for God to deal with but our duty is to repent and to forgive I don't know if you agree with that but the thing is this if you say or if I say that is easy then what I would say to that is there was nothing much to forgive in the first place and that's the reason why these disciples are seeing what Jesus is asking of them require them to seek more grace than they think they possess it's as if they're recognising what you're expecting us to do needs us to have a greater measure of faith in order to do it so having established that as a basis for our thoughts and understanding something of the need that there is for for our increase of faith to be something that is not a wasted resource you know some people and they they would say well it would be good if we had more faith but what for what are you going to do with your faith if you had it if you are saying to God give me more faith give me more of his grace

God is not going to bestow any one of his graces for us to place it as it were as we've said often as an ornament as if it's a trophy that we can display but not really use that's not what Christ is encouraging his disciples to seek if that is indeed what he is doing now what was on my mind when I began to look at this was really not the narrow limited way of in which the focus of the passage brings us to put a wider context if you like where we consider our faith where we need our faith to be examined and our faith to be found as something that is adequate to our needs in all these situations and if not why not what is it that is true about the circumstances that we find ourselves in that has made us perhaps desire a greater faith a deeper faith a stronger faith a more vibrant faith

[20 : 02] I'd like us just briefly to think of some possibilities that you might be aware of in your own life I'll cite a couple of examples from the scripture you know from the teaching of the book of Ruth of the way that Elimelech and Naomi left their home to go to the land of Moab when famine was in the land and let me remind you again what is faith what is the image that you have in your mind of faith and you remind yourself of that and the experience of that these two people who were believers in God in its simplest form they had a confidence and a trust in God a commitment to God that he would meet their needs and yet they left their own homeland and went into a country called

Moab that was idolatrous and alien to all that they believed now when our trust in God is compromised when our belief in God is something that is brought into question it always opens the door to what exists being eroded now without question without being too critical of these two people their behaviour led them into a situation where their faith would at least be under attack and the resulting providence where we read that Elimelech died and their two sons died that

Naomi was left by herself with her two daughters in law and by her own profession she says I went out full and the Lord has brought me home empty the Lord has testified against me the Almighty has afflicted me now that's her interpreting her providence and it's not just an interpretation where she is not realising how this happened she sees the hand of God against her whether she has the depth of understanding to realise that God is in some way punishing her or punishing her lack of faith in this situation there is a bitterness recognisably so understandably so but at the same time what we see following on from that which I think highlights where her faith stands is the counsel that she gives to

Orpah and Ruth to remain in Moab rather than to continue with herself she knows what she's asking them to do stay with your mother in this land of idolatry she knows that to be idolatrous what does that have to do with our faith well surely if we have faith in God then we should continue to identify our God as the God of our faith if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ if you profess his name are you going to abandon that profession when providence works against you are you going to say to somebody who is an unbeliever just go your own way my lot is a hard one it's a sore one

I can't commend my God to you where I am but that's exactly where you go if you go away from God or if you neglect the God of your faith then you allow erosion to take place that undermines your confidence in that God and leaves you unable unable if not incapable of testifying to that God to others you can disagree with that analysis if you wish when we are out of the way of faith rather than being bold for God we tend to see our witness suffer perhaps another easy example is that of David we don't question the reality of his faith but it is at least weak if not so diluted that it has exposed him to not just the possibility but the probability of sin to which he succumbs

[26 : 11] Donald Gray Barnhouse is talking about a Christian in a state of backsliding he says it never begins with a bang it begins quietly slowly subtly withering is a slow process barely perceptible at first either to the one being withered or to those who look on that's the way it is with backsliding however you know it doesn't you don't have to be talking about a major catastrophic backsliding we can backslide almost without anyone in this world knowing where we backslidden we can backslide in our personal devotional life to God we can backslide in our prayer life we can backslide in our reading of scripture we can backslide in our fellowships with God's people all of these areas are areas where we are open to backsliding and it can happen very subtly very slowly almost with us without us even being aware of it taking place but it does take place now I was reading

Psalms 51 and you're all familiar with that psalm it's a penitential psalm it's a psalm composed by David a David who knew the bitterness of sin and just one word that he says there could have focused on any but he says this restore me thy salvation's joy he says restore me thy salvation's joy so obviously he's wanting something that he previously had and I'm sure you appreciate that is true about David and everybody else if they are believers they have the joy of salvation but David through his sin lost that when did he miss it when did he sense that the joy of his salvation had gone how far down the road was he before he became at least sensitive to it if he hadn't been totally desensitized did he miss it did he miss it for long how long was it missing before he missed it do you know any joyless

Christians are you one of these joyless Christians and if so why it's difficult to work out because sometimes you're looking at something from the outside and there are some people and they have this effervescence they have this buoyancy there's natural joy if you like but that doesn't mean that they possess the joy of the Lord and vice versa you get some people and they're naturally seemingly down and heavy spirited it doesn't mean that they lack the joy of the Lord but the joy of the Lord is something that the person who is struggling with their faith may lack and sin is something that often intrudes into our experience in that sense and takes it away sometimes we suffer when persecution comes when we are tested by the enemies of God

God's name sometimes directly sometimes less obviously and I often think that if we recognise them to be enemies the greatest threat is not what they can do but how we respond to it how we react to it I have to say that's what I'm most afraid of how I react to it and when you're confronted with the enemies of the cross and often you are and they will test you solely where is your faith in if your faith is something that makes you withdraw because it's not strong or if it's not sufficient in your eyes maybe your prayer is

Lord like we have it here increase my faith but it is still an area you see where your faith is the focus and your faith needs to be considered in that situation so that when we read the gospels Christ tells us through the gospels he tells us of the dangers that we are exposed to when that happens he warns us against the fiery darts of the wicked he tells us the need that we have to be guarded and to put on the whole armour of God to wield the shield of faith to deflect the darts the thing about the darts of the wicked one is when they come at you during the day the earth not have us fearful or fearsome as they are when they come at you in the night when they come out of the night they're fiery darts and that is sometimes what you need to remember comes comes before my mind the wages of sin is death and his son said to him but he said there's another part to that text there's another part to that text the gift of

[34 : 03] God is eternal life through Christ Jesus the Lord and the old minister went quiet and all he said after a while of contemplation was do you know he said Satan kept that dark side of that text before my mind there was nothing but darkness but now you presented the light the bright side and God you know it wasn't you know the thing was this that even though the son came with the passage of scripture he didn't just instantly get relief it was in God's hand that relief came and he was able to lay hold of God's word and promise faith we needed to be kept we needed to be increased we needed to be to be at work in our lives at all times without love grows cold does

Christ not remind us of the danger there is for the Christian of forsaking their first love Christ forewarns the church that this is going to be a malaise that will affect the church of the new millennium the love of many will walk cold nothing ever to almost see on the internet and there were parables from the Red Indians and I was struck by the fact that many of these parables you could adapt and take into the

Christian experience and one of them might have heard used by Christians before talking about the struggle that goes on within the inner man the old man and the new man if you like but the Red Indians were using this illustration of two wolves wrestling or fighting within the heart of man which one was going to gain the mastery the one you feed most and that's the way it is for the Christian if you do not feed if you do not sustain the graces that God has given to you through constant constant applying applying to his word constant interaction with Christ constant drawing from the well if you like it's no wonder that our faith will begin to quiver and tremble and may God encourage us to understand that in this life of faith there are many things that will challenge that faith many different things not the things you expect perhaps even though you are right to expect them but to be aware of the unexpected to remember that the very things that you consider to be your strong tower might be the very thing that taught to shut the first hint of danger may God encourage us to look to him who is the author and finisher of our faith let us pray ever blessed God we give thanks for your word that reminds us of of the struggles that were even in the lives of the disciples when they were being taught by their Lord they understood in a measure what they were being asked to contend with and they saw how perfectly inadequate they were and for a moment they were distracted into thinking that all their power rested in their own strength but you teach us that our greatest resource is God above that you are the one to whom we must go and like Peter we believe his word to whom else can we go we pray that you would bless us according to the need that we have this evening whoever we may be whatever our greatest need may be help us to look to the one who is our God watch over us each one remember all who can't be here who would wish to be here remember all who have no desire to be here and have no interest whatsoever in what the church of Christ is doing in this world remember those who are grieving and sorrowful amongst us in recent days your voice has spoken to us repeatedly each with their own thoughts as they mourn the passing of loved ones may these thoughts be sanctified and may their attention be fixed upon one who is the conqueror of death pardon our sins in Jesus name

Amen we're concluding Psalm 62 Psalm 62 and verse 7 month with open moons morning magn aim Satsang with Mooji

Satsang with Mooji Satsang with Mooji Satsang with Mooji

[43 : 11] Satsang with Mooji Satsang with Mooji Satsang with Mooji Satsang with Mooji Satsang with Mooji Satsang with Mooji Satsang with Mooji Satsang with Mooji Satsang with Mooji Satsang with Mooji