

Serving Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Faith in Jesus is powerful. Jonathan, the slides are from last week, so just ignore the slides, okay?

! It should come as no surprise that when we come to church, we talk about faith. But then I guess it should come as no surprise that when Muslims go to mosques and Hindus go to their gudwaras, they talk about faith.

We are, after all, called people of faith. But in truth, we have very little in common with others called people of faith because of who we have faith in.

As Christians, it's not enough to say, I'm a person of faith. Rather, I have faith in Jesus Christ. And so really, it shouldn't surprise anyone when we come to church that we talk about faith and Jesus in the same sentence.

What makes Christian faith so different from any other kind of faith is the Jesus Christ in whom we have faith. Luke 17, 1 through 10 is a passage about what it means to be a disciple of Christ, to have faith in Him.

[1 : 1 9] And at the heart of this passage in verses 5 and 6 is a request from the apostles to the Lord, increase our faith. Clearly, in this request is implied, increase our faith in you, in you.

The word we translate as increase literally means to add to something that is already there. The disciples already have faith in Jesus.

They're asking for more. And there's nothing wrong with that request. Surely, we all want a stronger faith than we already have. Jesus replies, if you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it would obey you.

It's all very well asking for more faith. But Jesus wants His disciples to understand something of primary importance. Faith in and of itself is not powerful and not life-giving.

We've already seen that other religious people have faith. It's not faith which is powerful or life-giving. It's who we have faith in which makes all the difference.

[2 : 3 9] It's not faith, pure and simple, which is powerful. It's the Jesus in whom we have faith who is powerful. Faith means nothing without Jesus.

Even if we have faith as small as a grain of mustard seed, a tiny amount, it unites us to the Jesus in whom all authority and power in heaven and earth has been given.

It's Jesus who can order mulberry trees around. After all, that was through the word of His power, the whole universe was created. For Him to plant a mulberry tree in the sea is no big deal, given that He created the sea and He created the mulberry plant.

Jesus is teaching the disciples an important lesson. Don't talk about faith apart from the Lord in whom you have faith. Faith in and of itself means nothing.

It is not powerful, nor is it life-giving. It is the Jesus in whom we have faith who is powerful and life-giving. Think of it this way. The Nile is one of the largest rivers in the world.

[3 : 52] If you look from space, it irrigates a huge area of what otherwise would be bad in desert. Farmers who live beside the Nile dig irrigation channels from the Nile to their fields, thus allowing the rich waters of the Nile to make their crops grow.

What brings life to the crops isn't the irrigation channel, but the waters of the powerful and life-giving Nile River.

And in the same way, what brings life and power to our lives as Christians isn't our faith, but the Jesus in whom we have faith. Our faith is but the irrigation channel by which the life and the power of the risen and living Jesus flows down into our lives today.

The disciples need to learn that lesson. What's important isn't so much the size of our faith, but in whom we have faith, Jesus Christ.

Even the smallest grain of faith in Jesus is an irrigation channel big enough to give us access to the infinite power of God.

[5 : 08] It is faith in God which in the previous passage, we saw this two weeks ago, opened the doors of heaven to Lazarus. It's faith in God, which in the next passage, we'll look at next week, which will serve to heal ten lepers.

Again, therefore, what's important isn't so much the size of our faith, but that we have faith in Jesus Christ. By all means, let's pray, increase our faith.

But let's be sure that we're asking God to increase our faith in Him. Well, if the heart of this passage is the life-giving power of faith in Jesus in the lives of His disciples from verses 5 and 6, on either side of the heart of faith are what life-giving faith in Jesus gives us power to do.

These are examples of faith in Jesus at work in the life of a Christian. First, faith in Jesus overcomes sin, verses 1 through 4, and faith in Jesus empowers service, in verses 7 through 10.

Faith in Jesus overcomes sin and empowers service. The question this passage is posing is whether we have dug that irrigation channel between us and Jesus, or to put it more plainly, do we have faith in Jesus?

[6 : 45] First of all then, from verse 1 to 4, faith in Jesus overcomes sin. He overcomes sin. In our Bibles, this passage is entitled Temptations to Sin.

It's more than that, but certainly not less. Jesus presents its central message in verse 3. Pay attention to yourselves. Pay attention to yourselves.

He's calling us to turn the spotlight of our attention upon ourselves. It is easy to pay attention to others and to their sins. The Pharisees were experts at pointing out the sins of others, but it's an altogether different thing to pay attention to ourselves and to our sins.

As a rule, are we more concerned about the sins of others or about our own sins? Whatever the case, faith in Jesus overcomes sin in all its guises.

Again, it's not our faith that overcomes. It's Jesus at work through our faith who overcomes our sin. And in these four verses, we've got a couple of examples of how faith in Jesus helps us as Christians to overcome those issues we know to be wrong in our lives.

[8 : 03] First, in verses 1 and 2, we have righteousness, righteousness, and then in verses 3 and 4, we have restoration. Remember, Jesus is warning us, pay attention to yourselves.

In these areas of righteousness and restoration, we must keep a careful watch on ourselves and exercise faith in Jesus. In so doing, Jesus assures us we shall overcome and we shall conquer.

Our mulberry bush will plant itself in the sea. So, in verses 1 and 2, we have righteousness, righteousness, Jesus says, temptations to sin are sure to come.

You just can't go through the Christian life without being tempted in one way or another. It's inevitable that there will come times of testing and temptation, and we should not be surprised when they come upon us.

At these times, we'll be tempted to leave the righteousness of the law of love behind and embrace sin. They may be deeply personal to ourselves, but right now, perhaps we can think of one area in our lives in which we are being tempted to sin.

[9 : 16] Jesus says, woe to the one through whom they come. Woe to the one through whom they come. He probably has the Pharisees in mind when he says this because they were always trying to trip him and his disciples up.

It is a serious thing to introduce ourselves to sin, let alone to use our sins as an opportunity to tempt others. It's a serious thing to draw other Christians away from their faith in Jesus.

It's so serious that Jesus says 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.

There are worse fates than concrete boots in the New York River. It's a warning to everyone who's in a position of leadership and teaching in the church.

Our authority is a matter of life and death not just for those we lead and teach but for ourselves also. We must be ultra careful not to be those through whom temptations to sin come to others.

[10 : 27] Rather than encouraging others to sin, we want to encourage them toward the righteousness of the love and grace of Jesus. The issue for us, however, is how can we overcome these temptations to sin?

Surely the answer to this is found in the heart of our passage. It is through a living faith in Jesus Christ. Force of will is not enough.

A mind made up is not enough. It is only as the irrigating power of Jesus flows down into our lives through our faith in him that we can resist sin and pursue righteousness.

righteousness. The lesson for us is clear. When tempted to sin, pray for the help of Jesus. When tempted to sin, pray for the help of Jesus.

Remember how he resisted those three temptations in the desert and pray to be like him in overcoming and conquering this temptation. But then in verses three and four we have restoration.

[11 : 39] Restoration. With unfailing knowledge of the human condition, Jesus points in these verses to what may be the most frequently committed sin in the world.

That of unforgiveness. Of holding a grudge. If your brother rebukes him. 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.

Jesus sets this whole discussion in a family environment. If your brother, if your brother, he may be talking about what we understand as a family, but more likely he's thinking about the family of faith.

His disciples, his followers, what today we call the Christian church. So the scenario is taking place in a church fellowship between two Christians.

And he's describing the process by which these two Christians are reconciled to each other and how they handle each other's sins. Now we should take it for granted that this is something we will all experience in the life of the church.

[12 : 50] There's only one church where no one sins. And it's not here. It's in heaven. But here on earth, in every church in the world, we will sin against each other and we will need to forgive each other for our family relationships to be restored.

Jesus begins, as you see, by saying, if your brother sins against you, rebuke him. So if a fellow Christian sins against you, go and speak to him.

Point out his fault. Show him why he was wrong. We're not very good at this in Scotland. I'm rubbish at it. Whenever someone offends you, rather than going to speak to them about it, we tend to speak to others about it and let the offense fester and grow arms and legs.

And at that point, we begin to sin because we have not obeyed Jesus' command to go directly to our brother and point out his fault between the two of you. So if someone sins against you, if someone offends you, before you speak to anyone else about it, go and speak to that person.

Jesus then says, 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.

[14 : 14] Forgive someone who is sorry for hurting us, it's not optional for us as Christians. It's a command. You must forgive him. Even if he sins against us multiple times in a single day, and even if he comes seeking forgiveness, we must forgive.

It's not an option. It's a command of Jesus. Failure to forgive is a sin entirely as serious, if not more so, than the sin which began the whole process in the first place.

There is simply no place for a self-righteous attitude which bears a grudge and develops into bitterness. There's no place for an attitude which seeks revenge.

But then you say, well, what about the person who has sinned against me but does not want to repent? Who does not repent even when he's sinned against me?

Now, we can talk about that another time, but part of the solution, at least, is that they can only repent if they know they have sinned against us. And if we don't go to them one-on-one and tell them, they can't and won't be able to be sorry for what they have done.

[15 : 28] They can't repent of something they don't know they did wrong. So part of the answer to a lack of repentance on the part of the person who has sinned against us consists in telling them how much they've hurt us.

The point is, see how well Jesus knows us. He knows that embedded deep within each one of us are a series of unforgiving grudges. When a certain person comes to our mind, our first thoughts of them are not fond or affectionate, but bitter and twisted because we haven't forgiven them.

But then you say, you have no idea of how much that person hurt me. I cannot find it in myself to forgive them. They have all but destroyed me.

I cannot forgive them. Therein lies the power of faith in Jesus Christ. To the person who struggles to forgive because, I quote, I can't find it in myself to forgive.

Jesus says, if you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, be uprooted and planted in the sea and it would obey you.

[16 : 50] Of course, we can't find it in ourselves to forgive that hurt because it's simply not in our sinful human nature to forgive others when they sin against us.

It takes faith in Jesus to overcome our sin of unforgiveness. It takes a new heart which only Jesus himself can give us and it takes the cross of Jesus on which he died to forgive our innumerable sins against him to forgive others.

It takes that irrigation channel of Christ's life-giving powerful grace to forgive others when they sin against us. Only faith in a Jesus who forgives our sins can help us forgive the sins of others.

If only we realized how much we sin against Jesus and he freely forgives us as often as we go to him, we'd be far quicker to forgive others their sins when they hurt us. Bedding a grudge and harboring unforgiveness is one of, if not, the most frequently committed sin in the church.

Let's apply this. If someone comes to you to share how much someone else has hurt them, if you want to follow the example of Christ, listen patiently to them, sympathize with their hurt, cry with them if you need to.

[18 : 17] But do not tempt them to sin by further adding to their hurt, saying, that's awful. What a horrible person.

Rather, encourage your hurting friend to speak to that person who has sinned against them and then be ready to forgive them. Stand beside them through that whole process of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Pray for them. Pray with them. But rather than helping them to nurse their grudge, be a true Christian friend and help them to pursue restoration.

You see, only faith in Jesus is able to forgive the unforgivable. Only faith in Jesus is able to conquer our sin and unforgiveness.

Only faith is able to command the mulberry trees in our lives to be uprooted and planted in the sea. Only faith in Jesus. Only faith in Jesus. Well, secondly, if faith in Jesus overcomes sin, secondly and briefly from verse 7 to 10, faith in Jesus empowers service.

[19 : 34] Faith in Jesus empowers service. Here Jesus is speaking in these verses of a servant's attitude to his master. The servant spends all day in the fields and when he comes in he prepares his master's dinner before he prepares his own.

The servant should expect no favors from his master. Rather, Jesus says, does he, the master, thank the servant because he did what was commanded? We all like to be thanked for what we've done.

But if we were commanded to do it and we did it, we've done, all we've done is what we were commanded to do. And Jesus says, so you also when you have done all that you were commanded say, we are unworthy servants.

We've only done that which was our duty. We've only done what we ought to have done. No more, no less. Let's clear up a misconception. Serving God is no drudgery.

It's not a drudgery. Jesus here is talking in abstract about serving. The reality is that serving God is far more a duty, a delight rather, than a duty.

[20 : 43] More a delight than a duty. Having said that, it's not always easy to serve God. It's often said that we never get tired of the work of the Lord, but sometimes we get tired in the work of the Lord.

God's not a hard master. He's gentle and loving and He will never call us to do more than He can by His grace empower us to do. And of course it can sometimes be hard.

He calls us to wage continual warfare on our sin and in doing that to serve Him at home, in the workplace, in church, and everywhere else. From our previous point, He calls us to forgive the sins of others.

None of this is easy. But as God's servants, we do not have the right to pick and choose what command of His to obey. We obey them all or we obey none at all.

Our service to God must have no strings attached. Well, I'm willing to obey God in this area, but not in that area. I'm willing to obey God in not being the cause of anyone else sinning, but I'm not willing to obey Him in forgiving those who sin against me.

[22 : 02] As I say, it's full obedience or it's no obedience. It's a whole life of service. What our prayer is, Lord, what would you have me to do? Likewise, it's not a matter of merit as if the more I do for God, the more merit I have with God.

That's the way the Pharisees thought. The more I serve God, the happier God will be with me. If we're being honest, that's the way many of us think, that we're winning merit with God by doing good things for Him.

But the deeper truth is this. All we're doing by serving God is our duty, that which literally we ought to do.

There's no merit involved here. In fact, the reason we serve God so tirelessly isn't because of the hope that we will be rewarded at some point in the future.

The reason we serve God so joyfully and so tirelessly is that something has happened in the past. Jesus Christ, the very same Jesus, telling this story in Luke 17, offered Himself on the cross as the sacrifice for all our sins.

[23 : 18] He gave Himself body and soul for us. He paid the price of our sin and guilt. Having taken our sins upon Him in return, He gave us His infinite merit in exchange.

We don't serve God in the hope of adding our we merit to the infinite merit of Jesus. We serve God so joyfully because of what Jesus has already done for us.

And as we'll see next week, from the grace of God comes our gratitude to God. God's not a hard master. God's our loving heavenly Father.

It's a joy and a delight, a privilege and a pleasure to serve Him. But it's hard, it's sometimes very hard. How can we keep on going when we're exhausted? It's not within us to serve God in this way.

For we lack the energy and the stickability and the necessary endurance. We can only do it by faith in Jesus Christ.

[24 : 28] It's as that irrigation channel of Christ's living, life-giving power flows down into our hearts that our service for Him is empowered and effective.

The Nile River gives fertility to tens of thousands of square miles of fields along its banks. And the life and power of Jesus, ours through faith in Him, will give us life and power for serving Him.

To use Jesus' own image in another part, John 15, it's as the life-giving sap from the vine through our abiding in faith in Him.

It's as that sap flows into us, we can do great things for Him. Things we never thought possible. We can command mulberry trees to be uprooted and planted in the sea and they will obey.

Yes, we can work tirelessly and joyfully for Jesus. I'd like to think that we're all people of faith here. but people of a very unique kind of faith, faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the kind who would be willing to wear Evan's t-shirt metaphorically, even if not literally.

[25 : 53] It's not our faith which gives life and power. It's the Jesus, the Lord, in whom we have faith. faith. So, my final question therefore is this.

Do you have faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? Have you dug that irrigation channel to His life-giving water? If yet you don't, today is the day you must commit yourself to Him.

Or at least this, at least this, pray for that faith to believe and trust in Him. Faith in Jesus can do extraordinary things.

It can even uproot mulberry trees and plant them in the sea. Let us pray. Lord our God, we pray that You would forgive us for talking and thinking that faith in and of itself is something which is powerful.

rather, O Lord, we thank You that You are the powerful one and You work through the faith and yes, that faith itself even is Your gift to us.

[27 : 12] Lord, if there's anyone here today who doesn't yet have faith in Jesus Christ, we pray that at least they would pray these words. Lord, I pray for faith in Jesus.

We ask these things in His name. Amen.