

# Our Level Of Faith

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[ 0 : 00 ] permit baptism Parado the Our God and Father, we thank you that you have given us your written word in order that we may see your living word, even Jesus Christ.

And that you have granted to us the indwelling of your Holy Spirit, that in seeing your living word, we may understand your written word.

Grant us the grace of obedience. In Christ's name, amen. Turn, if you will, in your few Bibles to Matthew chapter 17 and verse 14, which is on page 18.

Matthew 17, verse 14, which is on page 18 of the New Testament section of your few Bibles. And there you see this simple story.

Coming as it does at the end of the mountaintop experience of Christ, where he was transfigured before the eyes of three of his disciples.

[ 1 : 30 ] This is what happens when you come down from the mountain. And it's happened to all of us. But he gets down to the bottom of the mountain.

And verse 14 begins. When they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and kneeling before him said, Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly.

For often he falls into the fire and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples and they could not heal him. And Jesus answered, O faceless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you?

How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here. And Jesus rebuked him. And the demon came out of him and the boy was cured instantly.

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, Why could we not cast it out? He said to them, Because of your little faith.

[ 2 : 40 ] For truly I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, move from here to there and it will move and nothing will be impossible to you.

So this is the story of Christ coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration. There are four levels of faith or perhaps of non-faith which he was confronted with.

The first level was that he was confronted by an epileptic child that was not able to do anything except in a sense to be subject to the illness which afflicted him.

And was in no way in this story crying out for help, but rather seeking opportunity to destroy himself. And that's one level of non-faith which afflicts many people.

They have lost even the desire to look for their own well-being. The second level of faith is one of the most eloquent levels in the whole of the New Testament.

[ 3 : 51 ] For this is the father who in his despair and in his anguish cries out in the record that is of this story in the Gospel of Mark, Lord, I believe, and thereby has very eloquently expressed what many people feel.

That they are crowded by the evidence that demands unbelief and over against that being crowded, there is nevertheless in their heart a desire to believe.

So that belief and unbelief are in conflict in this father. One other aspect of it, and I think that probably it's one of the most poignant places for us to be.

The place where we have someone whom we love very much indeed, someone for whom we are deeply concerned, who is someone that we are powerless to help.

And the father's love for his child in that situation is one of the most poignant forms of human suffering.

[ 5 : 04 ] And it's a place that we all try and escape from. It's a place where we would like not to have to be brought.

The place where we have to experience our powerlessness to deal with the suffering of someone whom we love. And yet it's a place where we must be eminently teachable as this father was. Jesus goes on to describe the third level of non-faith. And that was that he looked at this situation and he said to the whole generation, you are an unbelieving and perverse generation. How long do I have to put up with you? That the generation in all of history to which Christ himself came was marked by unbelief, by perversity.

And so you have that kind of climate of unbelief, a climate not of acceptance of God, but of perversity towards his will. And then the fifth, the fourth level of unbelief that you have is that exhibited by the disciples, whom Christ describes as, O ye of little faith.

[ 6 : 28 ] So that there's these four kinds. The child who wasn't even able to articulate his need. The father who in the midst of his doubts expressed the fact that he was almost compelled to believe.

The generation which was perverse and unbelieving and the disciples who had little faith. And Christ moved into that situation, healed the boy, turned to his disciples and told them, if you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you would be able to say to this mountain, be removed into the midst of the sea and it would be done.

And so he does, he takes something which is infinitely small, that is the amount of faith that's required, like a grain of mustard seed, a problem that is infinitely big, so big that it's compared to a mountain.

And he said, this can move that. That's the principle of faith at work in a community. Faith, like a grain of mustard seed, infinitely small, can deal with the mountain which is infinitely big.

And that's what he told his disciples. And he'd had the same trouble with them on four other occasions in the gospel according to St. Mark. When he was teaching the Sermon on the Mount, he said, Behold the lilies of the field and how they are clothed.

[ 7 : 58 ] And he said that he rebuked them for their little faith, that if God would clothe them, how much more would he provide for you? Then when they were out in a storm and Christ was asleep in the boat and they woke him up, he rebuked them for their little faith and then rebuked the storm.

And then once when they were hungry and they were discussing among themselves where they would buy bread, and Jesus again rebuked them for their little faith.

And then when they were confronted by, when Peter was trying to walk on the water and he began to sing, Jesus turned to him and said, Oh man of little faith.

So that this problem of little faith was confronting, too little faith was confronting the disciples because of their fear of death, because of their fear of the impossible, because of their fear of hunger, and in this instance because of their fear of disease.

They were reduced to being unable to do anything. And that's what this community is all about. This community of believers, which is St. John's Church, Shaughnessy.

[ 9 : 12 ] What level of faith are we expressing? The helplessness of the epileptic child that doesn't even know its own condition and is unable to believe in anything and seeks to destroy itself?

Are we in the position of the Father, caught in the position where we're almost overwhelmed by unbelief, and yet persisting in believing?

Are we in the position of the generation to which Christ addressed himself, saying you're a perverse and unbelieving generation? Or are we in the position of the disciples, when only faith as a grain of mustard seed is required, and yet their faith is too little even for that?

Now, you will have noticed in this past week that the price of gold has gone up. And I would urge you to buy, because all the best prognosticators say that it's going up to \$300 an ounce, so you can't help but win.

Well, there is a fairly strong and probably wise tendency in the uncertainty of our times for people to buy gold.

[ 10 : 29 ] Because when stock market shares are worthless, and when paper money is worthless, and when everything else is worthless, gold presumably will hold on to its worth.

And therefore you should have a pocket full of it somewhere, or a sock full of it under a mattress somewhere. Well, that probably is good advice if you're caught up in the stress of our world and the preservation of some kind of economic stability.

But faith is the gold of our Christian community. That's the capital on which we do business.

And if there's going to be any business done, it's not going to be done on paper religion. It's only going to be done with the gold of faith.

And if we don't have it in the bank, then we're not going to be in the position to do business. You will know that I came from Toronto not long ago, and everybody tells me that business-wise nothing's happening in Toronto.

[11:36] That things are kind of stale there. While things in Vancouver and British Columbia are very exciting by comparison. Well, I want you to see the parallel between that and the church.

What's happening in the church? Is business being done? Are great transactions being put through? Are great adventures being attempted?

Or are we, in a sense, holding on to our paper religion, hoping that someday it's going to have some value, which it doesn't seem to have just at the moment?

Well, that's what faith is. It's the gold of the Christian community on which all the business is done. Now, this is not only true of St. John's Shaughnessy. It's true of other churches in the New Testament. In Revelations chapter 3, there was a church in Laodicea, a neighboring church of the church at Colossae, if any of you want to remember that connection on Wednesday night Bible study.

[12:47] The church in Colossae was, in Laodicea at least, was a wealthy church because they had a special type of sheep that produced lovely black wool, which was famous throughout the Mediterranean world, and they exported it everywhere.

They had a great medical faculty in Laodicea that produced an eye-solve, which was sought by all sorts of people in a part of the world where there were all sorts of eye problems.

Plus, it was a banking center. So, when the Lord speaks to the church in Laodicea, he makes this same comparison.

He said, You say, I am rich and of crossword, and I need nothing, not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Therefore, I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, that you may be rich, and white garments to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen, and soft to anoint your eyes that you may see.

So there he says to the church in Laodicea, Buy this gold from me. And you see, this faith comes from Jesus Christ.

[14:08] It's something that we get from him. And that's how we build up, in this, as it were, the spiritual capital on which the church does business.

And if we don't have that capital, we can't do business. So we, like the church in Laodicea, need to turn to him who says, come and buy gold from me.

The other instance in which this happens is in the letter of Peter, to Peter. And it's, sorry, it's not to, it's by Peter.

And it's in the first chapter of Peter. And he talks about the same kind of thing. He says, you must be, you may have to suffer various trials.

But in those various trials, you'll find that the genuineness of your faith, which is more precious than gold, which, though perishable, is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

[15:14] And a church that is unwilling to face the various trials, which it must face, cannot have its faith refined. And this gold of our faith has to constantly be refined in order to improve its value, in order that we can do our business on the basis of it.

And then Paul, writing to the church in Corinth, in Corinth tells them much the same thing. He says that you have to be, you have to come to the place where the foundation, which is laid for you, which is Jesus Christ, is established.

And nobody can take that away. But what are you going to build on it? Are you going to build wood, hay, and stubble? Or are you going to build with gold and precious stones?

So that the building of our faith in this congregation is the thing that we have to do. Now, why do we have to do it?

Well, I think we have to do it as a congregation in order to come to the place where God wants us to be. The place where God wants to accomplish his purposes in us.

[16:31] We are surrounded, as I see it, by a great many mountains that are in our way. And when I go to this committee meeting, one great mountain forms up here.

And you go to this committee meeting, and another great mountain forms up here. And you go and visit some older parishioners, and another great mountain forms up here. And suddenly you feel slightly claustrophobic that we can't go anywhere because we're surrounded by mountains.

And these mountainous problems, whatever they are, and they're a rich assortment of mountains, these mountains have to be commanded by faith the size of a grain of mustard seed to move out of the way so we can move on.

We had series three last week at church. And it's a mountain because so many people consider it to be a problem.

And it's not essentially a problem. It's just that we have a problem, and series three is an attempt to get through it. But series three by itself is no solution.

[ 17 : 42 ] For any of you wondering what series three is, it's a communion service that we tried last week. But it's no solution. The only way you move mountains is by faith. And there are these kinds of mountains that stand in our way as a congregation of becoming what I'm sure God intends us to be.

But these mountains have us stop cold, and we've got to find the faith to move them out of the way that we may grow and develop as a congregation of Christ's people.

And I feel very much that one of the things that we lack as a congregation is gold. The gold of faith, which is the basis on which we do business with God.

And that faith has got to be able to do the thing which is impossible. I'd like to cancel the collection this morning.

That's probably too big a mountain to move. But it's just that... You see, what Romans says is very strange.

[ 19 : 01 ] It says, that which is not of faith is sin. So that everything we do is to be of faith. And this faith is the basis of all our transactions.

In other words, unless you pay for it with this kind of gold, unless whatever transaction you're involved in involves your faith, then it has nothing to do with God at all.

And what we need to do as a congregation is to acquire this gold through various trials to see it being refined.

To build with this gold, as Paul writes to the Corinthians, so that we have something which is of tremendous value to God. If our world is, in its wisdom, turning to buy and go because everything else has lost its value, surely the analogy is obvious to us as a church.

We need to turn to the faith which Christ gives us in order that we may do the business that he wants us to do. with the wealth of faith that he provides.

[ 20 : 27 ] And in that faith to move the mountains out of our way.