

INCREASE OUR FAITH

Jesus said to his disciples, "Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come! It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble. Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive."

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" The Lord replied, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you (Lk 17:1-6).

Jesus presented the above teaching to his disciples at a time when they seemed to be in danger of being overly enthralled with their own importance. Jesus, the master teacher that he is, often addresses his followers in a manner which will at once elevate them in aspiration, but humble them in heart. This teaching might easily be applied to the hypocritical Pharisees who professed godliness but practiced selfishness, or those who pretended to serve God, but served mammon instead.

Such tendencies of the human nature are not reserved to Pharisees only. Those who have the privilege of walking close to Jesus can easily slip into the snare of "prideful elitism", the slippery slope of thinking oneself to be a "spiritual insider". This mistaken mentality can cause one to readily offend or scandalize a person who is "young"---that is, "one who is new or immature in the faith". The scandal might take the form of a spiritual "put down", thinking of someone as not worthy of our fellowship, considering others too sinful, or having no patience with people who might be difficult.

To counter these ugly human inclinations, Jesus introduces his disciples to the *Millstone Motivational Method*. The picture he paints is quite illustrative. I've walked amongst the ruins of Capernaum and have seen an old millstone uncovered in the digs that dates to the very time of Jesus teaching there. The millstone sits a few feet from the waters of Galilee, the lake with a depth of 160 feet. The millstone weighs 500 pounds. The point is obvious---"one does not swim well with this millstone about the neck". The thought



Millstone in Capernaum

becomes even more scary when Jesus says the judgment rendered upon one who scandalizes "an immature one" will be even worse. To fail to discipline the "selfish nature" and to neglect to "forgive others", even though they may be a persistent pain in the neck, is to seriously jeopardize the soul. No wonder it is at this point that the disciples cry out "INCREASE OUR FAITH!"

Suddenly the confidence of the disciples is rocked, any prideful elitism is exposed for what it really is. Any illusion of being "deserved of congratulations" is blown away. What they now want is "more faith", faith which will enable them to be kinder to others, harsher on self.

What Jesus says next is a vital lesson in faith for all who believe. He speaks of the limitless possibilities available to those who have faith the size of a mustard seed. In other words, the tiniest speck of faith, just a minute amount of the genuine article will open infinite possibilities. If this kind of real faith is present and exercised, it will grow. This kind of authentic faith, when put into practice, will even enable one to transform the old selfish nature into a new holy nature---a nature of Christ likeness.

Jesus illustrates the boundless nature of real faith through the analogy of the "uprooted sycamore tree". The disciples were familiar with a common rabbinical teaching in that day which said "It would take a man 6000 years to untangle the roots of a sycamore tree". The massive mesh like entanglement of the root system of this common tree would render the movement of such a tree near impossible. Yet Jesus says that just a little seed of real faith, when activated by one of his followers, will cause the impossible to become possible. If you have any real faith at all, and are willing to use it, you will be enabled to win the victory over your own selfish nature. Even in the face of offense and ugliness, you will actually be able to offer perpetual loving judgment upon your offender. You will be able to gain victory over those things deeply rooted in every human nature---pride, anger, lust, jealousy, greed, sloth, gluttony. We must "believe" Jesus is willing and able to transform us

A MINISTRY OF LAY CATHOLIC EVANGELISM AND OUTREACH
Tom Edwards Evangelistic Assoc., Inc, P.O. Box 2113, St. Augustine, FL 32085

Tel:(904)471-8672 Fax:(904)471-9513

E-Mail-- goyotomedwards@worldnet.att.net

by the power of His Holy Spirit. We must know that without Him, we can do nothing. If we do not activate our faith and allow ourselves to become "a new creation in Christ", then we cannot but help offending others, especially those who bug us. If we offend those who are "young" in faith, we make our own necks to be "millstone ready". The consequences are disastrous.

So we see, just the smallest amount of "genuine faith" can do immeasurable things.

But, we might say: "Where do I get just a seed of real faith?" Never fear! The scripture declares that God has given every person a measure of faith (Ro. 12:3). That little speck of faith contains more power than all of the human resources in the world--"It is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord". Planting the seed means that we must stop worrying about what "I don't have" and what "I can't do". Instead we begin to focus on what "God has" and what "God can do". We must use the faith that God has given--only then do we get a full blown tree. *"Spiritual faculties are trained by exercise (Heb. 5:14)."*

Real faith, when activated, will tear out the entangled roots of ungodliness in our lives. It will lay the axe to "self trust" and "self complacency". The seed of "living faith"

that God has appropriated to each person is lying latent and loaded with life and power. When this faith is appropriated it will avail over all of the trials of life.

We must however, plant the real thing. A feeble faith will not suffice. Jesus sometimes chided Peter and the others disciples by saying "Oh ye of little faith". He was speaking of their immature faith, the faith which they had not yet learned to exercise. Feeble faith will accomplish little. It shrinks and falls in the hour of battle, it wilts at the heat. Jesus also severely rebuked those with only "formal faith". The Pharisees had "formal faith"---they went through the outward motions, performed the rituals, but all with no inward transformation of character. Formal faith apart from actual faith deludes and misleads. It is void of worth and becomes a great detriment.

Jesus calls his followers to rise up and use their "living faith" Plant the mustard seed and watch it grow. Great evils will be uprooted in God's power. Great good will be accomplished. Like a muscle which must be exercised to prevent atrophy, so also our faith must be used. The believers are called to press in, to strive in the use of faith. Then great and godly things will grow. **USE IT! FAITH WILL INCREASE!**