

3 - Greater Faith
Pastor Joe Oakley – GFC – 1/14/2024

Do you ever feel the need for greater faith? The disciples did. In Luke 17:5: *The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."*

So, if faith can be increased, that means that we can have greater faith. We are continuing our sermon series called Greater and today I am speaking on Greater Faith. 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4 says:

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

I see a couple of truths here: **Faith can grow, become greater.** But our faith is not just to believe God for greater blessings. In this case, Paul says the greater faith is to trust God even when persevering through trials.

So – to me – **greater faith means faith to believe God for greater things and faith to trust God in all things!** To have tough faith in tough times! We need both! Some people believe God for great things, but don't trust Him. Some people trust God, but never believe for greater blessings. We need both to have greater faith!

There are several kinds of faith mentioned in the Bible –

Saving faith

Ephesians 2:8-9 says: *For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

The gift of faith

1 Corinthians 12:9 says: *To others the same Spirit gives faith.*

The measure of faith

Romans 12:3 says: *God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.*

So, you have some faith because God has given each of us a measure of faith – but it is up to us to use it, strengthen it and grow it. All of us go through times when we need greater faith. There are times we struggle with doubt. There are times we feel weak in our faith. But the Bible teaches us how to build greater faith.

It seems that the need and desire for greater faith goes all the way back to the original 12 disciples. Luke 17:5-6 says:

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

They asked for more faith after Jesus said we must forgive people even if they sin against us seven times in one day. Hearing that showed the disciples their need for greater faith. By the way, this shows us that **unforgiveness is a faith problem!** Usually because we want to make our offender pay rather than trusting God to deal with them in His wisdom and timing.

So, Jesus taught them about the mustard seed principle. Jesus said we need faith like a mustard seed. He doesn't really explain it, but fortunately we have two other times when He taught on the mustard seed that give us more insight.

One of those times was when Jesus was transfigured on a mountain. When He came down the mountain He was confronted by a man whose son was demon possessed. The disciples could not cast it out, so Jesus did. Matthew 17:19-20 says:

The disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

He did not say you must have great faith. He said even a little faith will do great things. **This is the mustard seed principle. Little is much when God is in it.** Mustard seed faith is never dismayed at the size of the mountain because it does not consider its own small size. It only recognizes the size of God and believes nothing is too difficult for Him. You have mustard seed faith when you quit telling God how big your mountain is and you start telling the mountain how big your God is!

Jesus taught more about the mustard seed in Matthew 13:31-32.

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."

The parable of the mustard seed is about a little seed that grows into a large plant. One application of this is that the kingdom starts small, but grows large.

There is truth to that and that is why the Bible says that we should never despise small beginnings. Deb and I started this church with four other people. We sometimes have people come to us now who start a ministry or a small group and only 3 or 4 people show up and they are disappointed. I say, "Don't despise small beginnings! We started this church with only four other people – so you can grow something great in God's kingdom with a small beginning."

A mustard seed is much smaller than a kernel of corn or a grain of wheat, yet its growth is more spectacular, reaching a height of 10 to 12 feet. The point is that **great results can come from a small beginning.**

This truth will revolutionize our lives if it is rightly understood. You see, this parable of the mustard seed is an illustration of the potential in each of us.

Jesus compared the Kingdom to a seed which was so small that it could be blown out of your hand by a little breeze. Here was a picture of something that seems to be insignificant. The lesson is that there is great untapped potential in the mustard seed. The potential to become a giant plant was there all along in the seed. But this potential is untapped and unseen until the seed is planted.

One of the teachings of the kingdom is that **there is potential for greatness in each of us.** Each of us has the seed of faith residing within us. In Luke 17:20-21 Jesus said:

The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you. If you are born again, the kingdom of God is within you.

This is not some new age teaching that we are all gods -- we are not. There is one God, but He lives within all those who have given their hearts and lives to Him.

In Christ we have the potential to be all that God would have us be. We have the privilege to tap into the greatest resource of all -- the power of God. We must first understand who we are in Christ and who Christ is in us. It is so important for us to see what God can do in and through us if we will only be available to Him.

Do you want to see growth in your life? Do you want to realize your full potential in Christ? Certainly, you do. I believe that all of us want to succeed. We want to see our children succeed. We want to see our spouses succeed.

We want to see the Church succeed in fulfilling its calling and reaching others with the good news of Christ. We want to be a part of a great work for Jesus. We want to live our lives so that they count for something of eternal value. There is a desire for greatness in all of us.

We must realize we are like the mustard seed – insignificant in ourselves, but with potential for greatness. Some of you may say, "Well, I want to do something for God. But I can't. I could never do anything for God. I don't have what it takes. I'm limited in my gifts or talents or resources."

But that is precisely the point of the mustard seed! We do not have to have much strength or wisdom. We just need faith in the power of God to work through us. God has placed within each person far more than any of us could imagine. He has placed within us the life of His Son and the power of His Spirit!

I want to encourage you today – you don't have to start big – God uses the small things. You see, we are much like that mustard seed. Just as the potential for greatness was locked within that seed, so the potential to fulfill God's fantastic plan for your life is within you.

If you want to achieve greater things in your life – you do not need greater faith in yourself! You need greater faith in God!

By the way, **there are two times in the Bible when Jesus said that someone had great faith.** We find one in Matthew 15:22-28

A Canaanite woman came to Jesus, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession." Jesus did not answer a word. So His disciples came to Him and urged Him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." The woman came and worshipped Him, pleading, "Lord, help me!" He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."

"Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

What a story! This woman showed us what great faith looks like! She came to Jesus and she cried out to Jesus! Jesus said that had only come to minister to Israel, but this woman did not let that stop her. She kept on crying out to Jesus! And then she changed her cry to worship and Jesus healed her daughter.

That's what we need to do! Go to Jesus, cry out to Him, keep crying out and above all, worship Him! That kind of great faith moves Him! Matthew 8:5-13 says: *When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, asking for help. "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering." Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him."*

The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have You come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

When Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith... Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour.

In this passage, Jesus marveled at the centurion's great faith. And that great faith moved Jesus to perform a great miracle.

The interesting thing about these two people with great faith is that neither was Jewish. That meant they were both outside of the God's covenant with Israel so it is safe to say, they did not keep the "law" as Israel was required to do. That means that their confidence in God had nothing at all to do with their own performance or lifestyle. They just had great faith in Jesus to heal people they deeply cared about.

Whenever we get a glimpse of how mighty, awesome and loving our God is and we connect to His heart and see people as He does, it will always dramatically impact our faith and how we relate to people.

This is what Jesus saw in both of these people; they didn't come to get something for themselves, they came to see others set free. They used their faith to help others know and experience God's power and that is what real great faith is all about.

When you start seeing God's heart to bless, forgive, heal and set free those who are bound, struggling and defeated in life, you will also have the very same type of great faith that Jesus caused Jesus to marvel.

By the way, **there are two times in the Bible where Jesus marveled.** The biblical Greek word for marvel means to gaze at in wonder, or amazement, or astonishment. The two times when Jesus was amazed both had to do with faith.

The first time Jesus marveled is found in Matthew 8 in the story of the centurion and his great faith. But in Mark 6:6 – Jesus could do no miracles in His hometown because of the people's lack of faith. And *He marveled because of their unbelief.*

So – **two things astonish Jesus: great faith and no faith.**

Great faith results in kingdom authority and no faith results in no authority.
Great faith results in miracles and no faith results in nothing!

Jesus marveled at the faith of the Roman centurion because He found faith where one would not expect faith. Jesus marveled at the lack of faith in His hometown people because He found no faith where you would expect to find faith. There are several times when Jesus said people had little faith. In Matthew 6:30, Jesus said that those who don't trust God to provide for their basic needs have little faith.

On another occasion, Jesus said the disciples had "little faith" when they were afraid their boat was going to sink during a storm. Jesus calmed the storm anyway.

In the story of Peter walking on the water, when he began to sink, Jesus said he had little faith.

When the disciples when were concerned about their lack of bread, even though Jesus had already miraculously provided bread more than once, Jesus said they had little faith.

Here's the good news! NO, the GREAT NEWS! In each of these stories Jesus worked miracles despite their little faith. God is not limited by your level of faith!

Jesus saved the disciples and calmed the stormy sea, even though they had little faith. Jesus saved Peter from drowning even though he had little faith. Jesus provided for the disciples' needs even though they had little faith.

By the way, **almost every time in the Bible when someone's faith was increased, it was the result of a greater revelation of who God is.**

Either God spoke a word that gave greater insight or did something that gave greater revelation of who He is. Remember, **when our view of God is small, our faith will be small.** Greater understanding of God's word and God's ways always results in greater faith!

If you need greater faith, you are in great company. John the Baptist's faith was tested when he was put in prison. He sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He was really the Messiah. Jesus answered with evidence that gave John greater faith. That enabled John to persevere that persecution he went through.

Simon Peter's faith was tested the night he denied knowing Jesus. But Jesus came to him after His resurrection and spoke to him in a way that gave Peter greater faith. That enabled Peter to become a great leader in the early church.

Elijah had a crisis of faith when Jezebel threatened his life. But God spoke to him in a cave in a still small voice which gave Elijah greater faith. That enabled him to continue to minister in the power of the Spirit.

Gideon had absolutely zero faith when God called him to lead the army of Israel. But God spoke to him through signs and dreams than resulted in greater faith. That enabled Gideon to lead the army to victory over their enemy.

David and his men lost everything at Ziklag when an enemy destroyed their camp and took their wives and children captive. But David encouraged himself and strengthened himself in the Lord and that resulted in greater faith that caused them to get everything back.

I could go on and on with people we consider to be Bible heroes who had a crisis of faith that they came through with greater faith! And God will do the same for us!

You might be in a situation that causes you to say, "God I don't understand." But God can speak to you and give you great faith that says, "God, I trust you even though I don't understand."

You can be in a storm that seems like will drown you. But God can speak a word and give greater faith to walk on water.

You can be in a situation where someone in your family is bound up in an addiction or sinful lifestyle. It might seem like nobody can help.

But Jesus says, "Everything is possible for him who believes." At those times we need to be like the father of the demon-possessed son and say, "I believe – help my unbelief!" Lord, increase my faith.

Then get into God's word because faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. You need a word from God that builds greater faith.

Begin to pray in the Spirit and build greater faith. There's nothing more faith building than knowing that the Holy Spirit of God is praying the perfect will of God through you!

Get around people of faith instead of people of doubt.

Be like the mustard seed and have greater faith that even though you are weak – your God is all powerful.

Even though you have no answers – God has all the answers!

Even when we are faithless – He remains faithful!!