

Do you ever question in your life, if you are put into a very trying situation, whether or not you will have the faith to stand tall, stay devoted to Christ, and let your light shine to others? We look at situations that take place around us in our world, and we wonder. A young girl is held at gunpoint by a Columbine youth. The youth asks the girl, "Do you believe and trust in God?" The girl looks at the young man, and says, "Yes, I do!" The man pulls the trigger, and kills the girl. Would I have the faith to say the same thing as that girl? Or pretend for a moment you are Amish? You send your only daughter to a private Amish school. A gunman walks in one day, lines up your daughter and the rest of the children, shoots and kills them, then puts the gun on himself, and kills himself. The mother of the killer is devastated by her son's actions. Several Amish parents who have lost their children in death, go to the home of the killer's mother, and tell her they have forgiven her child for what he did to their children. Again, would you and I have such a faith to forgive someone who had gunned down our child?

Even if you travel into the Bible, you find these heroic demonstrations of Faith. Do you remember the story about the widow's mite? This lady was dirt poor and yet she gave 2 coins to the church for mission work. This gift was basically all she had to her name. It was a generous and sacrificial gift. Do you even wonder how she did it? I've often concluded that I couldn't do what the widow did because my faith is not as strong as hers. If you too have thought this, Jesus has news for us. In our text he uses a mustard seed and a mulberry tree to illustrate how even a small faith can do big things like restrain, rebuke, and forgive sin. So Christian, don't underestimate the power of faith. A little Faith Goes a Long Way.

So what is faith anyway? The best definition is in Hebrews 11, where it says, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

Faith is essentially trust or confidence in someone or something, that you can't see. So who or what are we trusting in or having confidence in? Our confidence or trust is in Jesus Christ, and believing that He keeps his promises to us, especially that promise of saving us at the cross. Everyone knows that Jesus suffered and died on a cross. But faith is believing why Jesus died on a cross.

It does not matter whether your faith is super-sized or seed-sized, explains Jesus, any size faith will do great things because faith is more portal than power; it's more wall-socket than battery. Do you get the picture? If we imagine faith to be a battery, we may be tempted to think that, like a small AAA battery, our faith doesn't have the juice needed to perform the tasks God asks of us. Even if our faith were the size of a car battery, we surmise, we'd eventually run out of juice. But faith is not a battery – a power stored inside of us that can only drain away each day. Faith is a portal, a wall-socket through which we connect to God's ever flowing, omnipotent-a-watt power. Connected to this immense power that brought the world into existence, that calms storms, that raises the dead we could tend our gardens by commanding the weeds to be uprooted and be sent to the compost heap, if that were God's will. What is God's will is that we restrain, rebuke, and forgive sin. Can we do these things? We sure can. When we remember that faith is more portal than power we will say with the Apostle Paul: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13). Through Jesus we can, do great things.

So what are some of the great things our faith allows us to do. First, we can be a good example in front of others, and not do things that cause the young in faith to

stumble.

Our text begins with Jesus saying: “Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. 2 It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. 3 So watch yourselves” (Lk. 17:1b-3a).

So, are you a good example to others, or, by your example, are you causing people to fall into sin? Think about that – have you ever set a bad example for someone else – by the way you talk, or by the way you conduct yourself. Have you ever lost your temper in front of someone else, or had a moment of impatience? What about your language? What about your priorities? Do others learn what it means to be a cheerful servant from you? Do they learn how to tell the truth, or bend the truth? Should I keep going? I don’t think I need to. It’s clear that God ought to hang millstones, not medals around our neck for the way we often promote sin instead of restrain it. But Jesus says, Even with a little faith, you can be a good example to others. Don’t underestimate, how the Lord can change you to be a good example. You can be a good example.

Or what about rebuking a Christian who is on a sinful path? Even with a mustard seed faith, you have the power to confront them.

Although pointing out sin is a loving thing to do, society tells us to mind our own business. Unfortunately we Christians have listened to society and we don’t rebuke one another as often and as quickly as we should. If one of us, for example, were to crack a crude joke, how many of the rest of us would rebuke the sin? Aren’t we much more likely to remain silent, even pat ourselves on the back for not having been the one to crack the joke?

Let me illustrate how dangerous it is to think that my neighbor’s sin is none of my business, and to suppose that as long as I keep myself from sin all is well. Everything was great on that flight to Hawaii until a passenger decided to cut a hole in his window. What was even stranger is how none of the other passengers said anything as the man sawed away at the Plexiglas. What could they do, the other passengers reasoned? If that man wanted to let everything not bolted down in the airplane fly past him out his open window, well, that was his problem, not theirs. Not their problem? Of course it was their problem! They should have tackled the man and taken his saw away, for the action of that one man would adversely affect all passengers aboard that flight. Fellow members of Open Bible, when we think that the sin of another Christian is none of our business, in time our whole congregation will crash and burn. That’s why Jesus gives us steps to deal with sin (Matthew 18). The purpose of church discipline is to save souls. Therefore it’s worth doing the way God wants it done. Rebuking sin shows us to be good Christians because it shows that we care. A little faith gives you the courage to admonish an erring brother or sister in the faith.

And there is even one more remarkable thing, just a little faith can do. That is, you will be able to forgive a person who hurts you. Jesus went as far as saying, “If [your brother] sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him” (Lk. 17:4). Jesus doesn’t just want us to forgive once or twice. He wants us to proclaim forgiveness again and again, even if this means forgiving the same person seven times for the same sin in the same day!

Don’t you find forgiveness to be a beautiful concept until you have to practice it?

While we love to hear how God has thrown our sins into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19) we're slow to do the same for one another. We may even consider it impossible to forgive certain people and so have refused to do so.

The disciples must have felt the same way because after hearing how Jesus wanted them to restrain, rebuke, and forgive sin, they exclaimed: "Increase our faith!" (Lk. 17:5) That sounds like a pious response but the disciples might as well have said, "Who can do these things, Lord? They're impossible! We don't have enough faith." In reality they were blaming God for their inability to do what he wanted them to do. That helps us understand what Jesus meant when he responded, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you" (Lk. 17:6). Jesus was not suggesting that true believers should be able to tend their gardens simply by commanding the weeds to be uprooted and sent to the compost. Of course if that was God's will, it could be done that way. Jesus' point was that the disciples didn't need extra faith to do the seemingly impossible things he had urged them to do. God had already given them the power to restrain, rebuke, and forgive sin. The disciples just weren't making use of that power. Instead they were making excuses by saying their faith was too small.

Sound familiar? Have you ever heard yourself say, "Oh, I've tried to forgive that person but I just can't. I guess I don't have a strong enough faith." But my friends, God has already given us the power to forgive sin. The problem is not the amount of faith we have, but focus. When we can't forgive it's because we are looking to ourselves for the power and not to God. When we think we can't do what God wants us to do we need to call to mind these words of the Apostle Paul: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17) God has changed us through Christ. All the millstones we deserve to have hung around our neck have been placed around Jesus and our sins have been drowned in the depths of the sea. We are not only forgiven but we have been renewed to do what God wants us to do. Paul went as far as saying, "I can do everything (restrain, rebuke, and forgive sin) through him who gives me strength" (Philip. 4:13). It's not the "size" of your faith that matters; it's the focus. Focus on God's love for you and you will be able to restrain, rebuke, and forgive sin.

Jesus ends our text with a parable about a master who doesn't thank his slaves for doing what he has commanded them to do (Lk. 17:7-10). The point of the parable is that when we do, with God's help, what he wants us to do, we should not think that we have done something special and deserve a pat on the back for it. Restraining, rebuking, and forgiving sin is simply our Christian duty.

How does she do it?" Whether we say that about someone who is good at playing the piano or good at forgiving others, one thing is true, that individual can play the piano and forgive sin because God has given her the ability to do so. While God may not have given us the gift of making music, he has empowered each of us to restrain, rebuke, and forgive sin. That's his promise. Stay focused on this promise and you will do what seems impossible no matter how small your faith may seem. A Little Faith truly goes a long way. Don't underestimate the Power of Faith!