

Bi132 The Gospels I

Lesson Bi132-39 Jesus and Faith

Defining the meaning of faith can be challenging. A dictionary defines faith as ‘belief, trust in, and loyalty to God, especially with strong conviction.’ True faith is more than just wishful thinking or a positive feeling about life. The apostle Paul tells us that “faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ” (Rom 10:17). The faith Jesus desires us to have is a faith that moves us to actions, actions directed by God Word. The writer to the Hebrews says, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb 11:1). This lesson discusses what Jesus taught his disciples about faith.

Jesus said to his disciples: “Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble. So watch yourselves” (Luke 17:1-3). Jesus was warning about behavior or words that might cause a new believer to lose faith or stumble into sin. He said it would be better for a person to have a heavy grinding stone tied to them as a weight and to be thrown into the sea to drown, rather than to cause a young Christian to sin. Jesus also instructed them to forgive such a brother or sister, even if they sinned against the disciple seven times a day, as long as the person repented.

The Twelve evidently felt incapable of measuring up to Jesus’ high standards. They felt the need of greater faith to have the power to follow his teaching. So the apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” Many of us have no doubt prayed that same prayer.

Jesus replied, “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” (Luke 17:6). Another time Jesus said, “You can say to a mountain ‘move from here to there,’ and it will move” (Matt 17:20). Anyone who says this “and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him” (Mark 11:23). So when we pray, we must believe and trust God before we see the result.

Why did Jesus talk about common things like a seed and a tree? The mustard seed was the smallest garden seed, it was a herb, yet it had the potential for great growth. The mulberry tree could grow to 10 meters (30 feet) tall and was known for its deep roots. Jesus’ message using this figurative language meant that even a small amount of faith can have a great result. He encouraged them to use the faith they had. And as they acted in faith, that action would make their faith grow. If they would trust God for the answer, even before they could see it with their eyes, they would eventually receive. The life of faith is a life of action. The amount of faith was not the important thing; using the faith one had was the important thing.

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. Lepers could not live with family or in villages, but only separately by themselves. They had to wear torn clothes and

not cut their hair. There was no other group so shunned and outcast in Jesus' day. When they encountered people they were to cover their faces and shout, "Unclean! unclean!"

As they approached Jesus they stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" These men knew Jesus' name. News travels. The lepers asked for mercy and addressed Jesus as Master. They believed Jesus had the power to deliver them. They put their faith in action by approaching him as a group. Now they probably expected Jesus to touch them and heal them immediately, as he had other people. What Jesus was saying was, "You are healed. Now keep obeying the Law. Go and show yourselves to the priests." The priest would quarantine them seven days and then examine them to make sure they were really cured. Christ was telling them to do what was necessary to get back into society.

To follow Jesus' instruction required faith. They could have said, "We don't feel very good. We still have sores and scaly skin. We are missing fingers and toes. No, we are not moving from here until you heal us. We are not going to make fools out of ourselves in front of the priest." They wanted the feelings first, but Jesus wanted the lepers to show faith before the feelings came.

Reluctantly they turned, and *as they went*, they were cleansed. Sometimes we would like to take the risk out of Christianity. God wants us to obey him first, and then wait for the miracle. Do you have faith to believe when circumstances are bad—even though you don't feel anything? Jesus wanted them to trust him and obey. As they moved in faith, they were healed. When you choose to do your part, God brings the miracle.

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?"

Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well" (Luke 17:11-19).

This lesson on faith is **important** because it shows that God wants to increase our faith. He wants us to choose to put our faith into obedient action and then wait for God to bring the miracle answer to our prayers.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that Christians need to trust and obey, to believe before they see. This is the kind of faith that pleases God.

Let's review this lesson—

1. What request did the disciples make to Jesus concerning their own faith?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said the disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith, you are correct.
2. What did Jesus say to the Samaritan who returned to him after he was healed of leprosy?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you answered Jesus told the Samaritan to rise and go; because his faith had made him whole, you are correct.

3. What do we learn about faith from the healing of the ten lepers?
 - A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said we learn from this story that trust and obedience come first, then seeing the miracle, you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the story of the ten lepers and tell it to someone new. After telling them the story, ask these questions, “Is anything too hard for God? Do you believe that even the small amount of faith you may have, can move the hand of God when you bring a need to him?” Suggest that the person share one of their requests with you, so that you can join your faith to theirs and lift that need to the Father.