



MINISTRIES

A Ministry of the Athens Universal Life Church
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TITLE: SHAZAM—or Not!

SERMON IN A SENTENCE: God answers our prayers—not necessarily with a sudden SHAAA-ZAM kind of miracle—but often by shepherding us with little nudges over a period of time—until we suddenly look around and realize that we are just where we need to be.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 17:5-10

Today’s scripture lesson comes from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 17, verses 5 to 10.

Starting at verse 5:

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.”

“If you have faith the size of a mustard seed,” the Lord said, “you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.

“Which one of you having a slave tending sheep or plowing will say to him when he comes in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat’?

Instead, will he not tell him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat, get ready, and serve me while I eat and drink; later you can eat and drink’?

Does he thank that slave because he did what was commanded?

In the same way, when you have done all that you were commanded, you should say, ‘We are good-for-nothing slaves; we’ve only done our duty.’”

-- May the Lord add His Blessing to the reading of His Word!

-- I am Doctor Rob White with the A U L C Ministries with our message this week.

-- I am happy that you can take a few minutes out of your busy week to be with us today!

Jesus told the disciples what was expected of them, and they responded by asking, "Increase our faith!".

"Increase our faith!" That speaks to me! People talk about the Bible being comforting, but I often find it discomfoting. Sometimes Jesus says something comforting, such as:

**"Come to me, all you who labor
and are heavily burdened,
and I will give you rest."
(Matthew 11:28)**

But more often he says things that are discomfoting, such as:

**"Love your enemies."
(Luke 6:27)**

Mark Twain put it this way. He said:

"Most people are bothered by those passages in Scripture
which they cannot understand;
but as for me,
I always noticed that the passages in Scripture which trouble me most
are those that I do understand."

That was what the disciples were experiencing when they asked Jesus to increase their faith. They could see that Jesus was asking a great deal of them, and they wanted help. "Increase our faith!" they asked.

When I was studying this scripture, I was intrigued by something that a scholar named Joel Green had to say about it. He noted that in Luke's Gospel, prior to chapter 17, Jesus had mentioned faith only five times. He then said that:

"In each case, ...Faith leads to faithful behavior....
(This request by the disciples, then), 'Give us faith,'
is tantamount to saying, 'Make us faithful people!' "

"Make us faithful people!" That was what the disciples were asking. "Help us to do it right!" That is what they wanted.

I was also struck by the fact that Jesus didn't answer their request in the way that they expected. He didn't wave a wand over them and magically fill them with faith. Instead, he told them that faith is so

power-packed that even a tiny bit could do magical things—such as to uproot a great mulberry tree and plant it in the sea.

In a way, I was disappointed. I didn't want Jesus to tell the disciples how great faith could be. I wanted him to answer their prayer—to give them what they asked for.

But then I was intrigued by something another scholar, Craig Evans, had to say. He said:

"But through his further teaching, example,
and provision of the Spirit,
(Jesus) produces in his apostles a mighty faith,
one that will proclaim the Good News boldly
and gladly will suffer persecution."

When I stopped to think about that, I was stunned! I suddenly realized that Jesus DID give these disciples what they asked for. Jesus DID give them faith. He just didn't do it as some sort of instant miracle. Instead, he continued his patient shepherding day-by-day until his disciples finally became what they had asked to be—faith-filled—faith-full! It was only after the resurrection that they got there, but WOW!—Did they ever get there!

That is how it works, isn't it. Every good parent sees it happen. We would all like to wave some sort of magic wand over our children and see them suddenly morph into responsible people—dependable people—moral people—good citizens—people of faith. We would like to wave a wand and have them move instantly past all the dangers that kids face—drugs, cars, bad friends.

But that isn't how it works. You parents know how it works. Every day you work with your children. You try to teach them what they need to know. You try to help them to make friends with good kids. You try to get them to do their homework. You try to get them to clean up their room. You take them to Sunday school and church. You encourage them to be active in the church youth group.

And then finally the day comes when they graduate—and put on a suit or a nice dress—and start looking for a job. And then comes the day when they have children of their own, and you see them trying to get their kids to do their homework—and clean up their room.

Then suddenly you realize that somehow you succeeded. The dream that you dreamed has come true. Your kids are grown, and they are o.k. It seems like a miracle—but it wasn't a sudden SHAAA-ZAM kind of miracle. It was a miracle that happened day-by-day—so slowly that you didn't notice that it was happening—but it was.

That was what happened to Jesus' disciples. They said, "Increase our faith!"—and it seemed as if nothing happened—except that Jesus preached them a little sermon about mustard-seed faith moving a giant tree.

But Jesus knew what he was doing. He was moving them inch-by-inch in the direction that they wanted to go. He knew that their journey would be neither quick nor easy. They would get discouraged along the way. They would wonder if God had abandoned them. But then one day they would look around and realize that they had become the faith-giants that they had asked to be. Jesus answered their prayers. He just didn't do it instantly.

All of which should be instructive to us!

- We pray, "Increase our faith!" and Jesus says, "Love your neighbor."
- We pray, "Increase our faith!" and Jesus says, "Love your enemy."
- We pray, "Increase our faith!" and Jesus says, "Love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind."

And slowly but surely Jesus nudges us toward faith—helps us to become people of faith.

- We pray, "Lord, save our children!" and Jesus says, "Read them a Bible story at bedtime."
- We pray, "Lord, save our children!" and Jesus says, "Pray with them."
- We pray, "Lord, save our children!" and Jesus says, "Sit down at the dinner table as a family. Say grace before you begin to eat."
- We pray, "Lord, save our children!" and Jesus says, "Take them to church."
- We pray, "Lord, save our children!" and Jesus says, "Help them to choose the right kind of friends."

And slowly but surely Jesus nudges us in the right direction—so that our prayers can be answered—so that we can help our children to grow up to be people we can be proud of.

- We pray, "Lord, save our world!" and Jesus says, "Invite your friends to church!"
- We pray, "Lord, save our world!" and Jesus says, "Go on a mission trip!"
- We pray, "Lord, save our world!" and Jesus says, "Give money to help hurricane victims."
- We pray, "Lord, save our world!" and Jesus says, "Drive for Meals on Wheels."
- We pray, "Lord, save our world!" and Jesus says, "Visit a friend in the hospital."
- We pray, "Lord, save our world!" and Jesus says, "Get out and vote!"

And slowly but surely Jesus nudges us to do those things that will help to make this a better world.

We want quick answers. Jesus teaches us patience.

Judy Hyland wrote a book entitled *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun*. Judy was a missionary in the Philippine Islands when World War II began. Japanese soldiers quickly invaded the Philippines and put the missionaries in prison camps. Judy was in a prison camp for nearly four years.

- Four years without freedom!
- Four years jam-packed, elbow-to-elbow with other prisoners!
- Four years of fathers being separated from their families.
- Four years without adequate food!

- Four years with no medication!
- Four years without word from outside!
- Four very long years!

To imagine what that must have felt like, stop and remember where you were four years ago. Where were you in October—Year 2020? Covid-19 was becoming rampant, and we had no idea that it would continue so long.

- Now imagine that you had been imprisoned in October 2020, and hadn't had a good shower or decent meal in all that time.
- Imagine that you had no news from the outside world—that you had no idea if you would ever be free.
- Imagine wondering for four years if you would die in prison. That's what life was like for Judy Hyland.

Judy prayed for the war to end. She prayed to be freed. She prayed to survive. Every day she prayed, but every morning she awakened to find herself still in prison—still hungry.

Some people couldn't handle it. Some of them lost faith. Some gave up. Some died. There were plenty of reasons to die, and some died of things beyond their control—but others died because they just gave up.

But after nearly four years of awakening to prison walls, the day finally came when American soldiers came—when they fought their way to the doors of the prison—when they opened those doors and set the prisoners free.

Those soldiers took the prisoners to a reparation center where cooks had prepared a lavish meal. We wouldn't consider it a lavish meal, but those men and women who had nearly starved for four years were overwhelmed. They stood at that table as if paralyzed, unable to decide what to take. The serving ladies assured them that they could have whatever they wanted—as much as they wanted.

Finally the prisoners—prisoners no longer—began to fill their plates. Finally they began to eat. Then Judy told what happened next. She said:

"The sounds of eating and clatter of dishes
were temporarily silenced
when a father sitting at the table with his four children
bowed his head
and in a ringing voice thanked God
for food and freedom
and asked a blessing on America."

She went on to conclude, "There was hardly a dry eye at the amen."

I don't know what you pray for, but I know these things:

- I know that God doesn't always answer prayers quickly.

- I know that God doesn't always answer prayers in the way that we wanted or expected.
- I know that God doesn't always make life easy.
- But I know that God, in his good time, brings great blessings to those who come in faith.

"Increase our faith," the disciples asked. It was a good prayer. In due time, God answered it. He didn't answer quickly or in the way that they wanted—but he answered. After the resurrection, those disciples became faith-giants! Faith-Giants!!! They turned the world upside down for Jesus.

"Increase our faith." It's a prayer for today. It's a prayer for us. Let's pray that Christ will increase our faith. Then let's wait in peace, knowing that he will answer—not quickly perhaps—and probably not as we hoped.

But the day will come when Jesus will show us glories that we never expected to see—when we will see mountains march across the landscape—and great trees planted in the seas—and lives transformed—and the heavens opened to reveal a welcoming Savior.

Lord, increase our faith, we pray! Amen!

-- That's our Lord's message for this Lord's Day and I hope you got a blessing out of it!

-- Go out this week and be a blessing and be blessed! -- For the more you are a blessing, the more you will be blessed!

-- Thank you all for watching and listening and we will see you all next week!

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