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SERMON TITLE: In Everything Pray with Faith: (How to Build Faith)
SCRIPTURE: Matthew 17:14-20
DATE: August 11, 2019
Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Read also 2 Chronicles 32:24-26

We are talking about prayer because we have been moved as a church to pray. We have begun a parking lot prayer ministry to parents whose children attend Reed Middle School. We are initiating a citywide website for people in Duncanville to pray called duncanvilleprayer.com because God desires us to pray. We need individuals to pray not only for themselves but also for their city and nation. We have invited other churches in Duncanville to pray for us. This work is guided by both the Old and New Testaments.

King Hezekiah of Judah had been king for some decades when he developed a serious problem. If something was not done, he would die. Hezekiah was a man of faith though, exercising faith throughout his reign, building Judah by doing what was right in God's eyes (2 Chron. 29-32).

- He had destroyed all false religious monuments throughout the land.
- He insisted the people throw away their idols. (2 Ch. 31)
- He reopened the temple; rehired the priests and Levites, initiated worship, made a covenant with the Lord, and restored the sacrifices and festivals.
- He asked the people to bring tithes and offerings to support the church.
- Then he called for the nation to celebrate Passover saying: *"Do not be stubborn, as your ancestors were, but submit yourselves to the LORD and come to his sanctuary. . . . Serve the LORD your God so that his fierce anger will turn away from you"* (2 Chronicles 30:8).

Prosperous life; blessing of city and nation depends on faith in God. But as the messengers carried that message, the people laughed them to scorn.

But Hezekiah prayed for the people and spoke encouragingly to the priests and leaders, and to all who brought offerings to the festival. The few who had faith and came grew until they were many.

In fact, it felt so good to worship the Lord that the festival ran over by a week!

It was so good to have faith as a center of public life again that the people's offerings began to pile up in heaps so there was plenty to spare. (31:5-12) They could run the church and help the poor.

There was great joy in Jerusalem because as the leaders prayed, God heard and blessed them, for they committed their hearts to him. (30:27)

King Hezekiah led by example: "every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God, and in accordance with the law and the commandments, to seek his God, *he did with all his heart; and he prospered.*" (31:21). He lived his faith publicly as a lifestyle.

True faith is seeking God with all your heart in the work God has given you. He had some hard times with enemies that came against the nation but purposeful prayer saw him through. (Read about it 2 Chronicles 32).

So when Hezekiah became ill unto death, it was the most natural thing to pray in faith. He had been relying on the Lord with his whole heart. That would not change now. The Lord answered him, gave him a sign, and he was healed. It seems so simple. He had faith. He prayed, God gave him a sign and he was healed. Are there some stories of faith in the Bible that annoy you because of their simplicity?

Fast forward to the New Testament to another need for healing. READ Matthew 17:14-20

The disciples fail at this healing thing but Jesus intervenes, answers the man's prayer, and heals the boy immediately. Simple. That's great! But in reality . . .

Are you like the disciples? Feeling like failures—*why can't I get results?*

Let me repeat: "You don't have enough faith," Jesus told them. "I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible."

Ouch. "Just have enough faith." It sounds so easy . . .

A former member of this congregation used to preach to anybody and everybody about his favorite attribute – enthusiasm. The word actually means "God in you." Del Anderson had a great career and he based it on this saying. His son Doug said, "His saying was great in good times, but watch out. Especially when things don't look so great, my dad never fails to say, 'Make yourself a good day.' It can be so annoying."

Del did not stop saying that even after he had a stroke and was in a wheelchair. He was saying *excel at 'God in you' daily*. I ran into Doug recently at Ben Franklin and as he shared that as he increased in faith and prayer, his hard circumstances changed and his joy is vibrant.

Faith is a lifestyle. I do not think Jesus was saying, *live like you want most of the time, and then conger up some faith when a disease hits you and it will be okay*.

No, when Jesus says, "you don't have enough faith," he means faith has to be the mainstream focus of your life. When faith is mainstream, it means faith is your lifestyle—it means God is the first, most important thing in your life. True faith is not something that shows up at crucial times only, like a health crisis or some other crisis, but something that is your priority all the time, along with prayer.

Faith is the habit of trusting God, prioritizing God more than anything else in your life as you keep that constant prayer connection.

Look at disciples – what was their focus most of the time? When Jesus left there, he told them that he was going to suffer and die. They resisted that thought.... Then they went on to talk about which of them was the greatest.

Was their lifestyle one of mainstream faith?

If you seriously looked at your life, what are the most important things? Is it your spouse or your family, your job, or your health, or your girlfriend or boyfriend? Where is Jesus on that list? When you seriously follow Jesus, he will challenge you to make him your first priority. Then he will not need to say, "How long do I have to put up with you? You don't have enough faith." Ouch.

Jesus encourages us: "I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible."

It takes time. Many of those disciples he spoke to went on to experience great miracles because their faith became a lifestyle. That has not changed today. If you allow Jesus to be the most important reality in your life, even if you continue to have physical limitations, you can be healed in incredible ways in the midst of it.

Fifty-two years ago Joni Eareckson Tada had an accident at age eighteen, and became paralyzed from the neck down. She had been raised as a Christian but Jesus was not her first priority until later. Sometimes hard times drive Christians away from the Lord. But sometimes such difficult circumstances will drive people closer, to make God their first priority, like Hezekiah.

Joni Eareckson Tada decided to pray for her paralysis to be healed, but it didn't happen. She went into a deep depression. But then she decided to simply trust God; do the best she could to put God first, pray and live by faith.

She began a ministry called Joni & Friends.¹ She was invited to speak at Billy Graham crusades. She wrote books—forty so far. She's an artist who paints with a brush in her mouth, a singer, radio host, and advocate for the disabled. She served on the National Council of Disabilities for the United States Congress which produced the first draft of the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act).

Even though a quadriplegic; even though in a wheelchair, she has moved mountains for millions of people, people all over the world—by FAITH. God needed her to minister to people with disabilities.

In recent years, though, she got breast cancer; Stage 3. But she was cured. Then recently it returned. She put out a plea for prayer. She went through treatment. She developed a lung complication. It wasn't easy. But last month she received a completely clean bill of health—she was healed! She and her husband and friends are praising and thanking God.

Joni said to this mountain, *move from here to there*, and it was done for her. She has done with her life more she could have ever imagined. It didn't happen due to money or human skill but it took one thing: FAITH in the One who can accomplish the impossible.

Our story was about a boy with epilepsy who walked away from that disease. In Joni's case with her paralysis that did not happen. But God was at work, and something greater happened which has brought healing to people, cities, and nations.

Are you struggling with something that you can't see your way through? Are you not making much progress? Do you feel like you are wallowing in the problem? Listen to Jesus. Make faith your lifestyle. Check out where Jesus fits in your list of priorities and move him to FIRST place. In everything PRAY and build your faith. It will affect your life. You will change the lives of those around you, like Jesus changed the life of that man's family and eventually, his disciples.

Our nation needs healing, just like the nation of Judah did. It begins with FAITH and prayer. It begins when one city sets prayer as the priority—like Hezekiah did in Jerusalem. One city impacts one nation. Then healing will begin to unfold like you could never imagine.

AMEN

¹ See Joni & Friends at <https://www.joniandfriends.org/>