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ESF, Lord's day service message

How To Build Up Living Faith

Mark 8:14-21

¹⁴ The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. ¹⁵ "Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod."

¹⁶ They discussed this with one another and said, "It is because we have no bread." ¹⁷ Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? ¹⁸ Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? ¹⁹ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Twelve," they replied. ²⁰ "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"

They answered, "Seven." ²¹ He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"

A businessman was late for an important meeting and couldn't find a parking space. As he frantically circled the block, the man got so desperate that he decided to pray.

Looking up toward heaven, he said, "Lord, take pity on me. If you find me a parking space, I'll go to church every Sunday for the rest of my life, and not only that, I'll give up drinking."

Miraculously, a parking space appeared.

The guy looked up again and said, "Never mind. I found one."

While the man prayed, he seemed to have a faith. But when his prayer was answered he stopped believing in God. Such a faith cannot please

God. It is a selfish and weak faith. Such a faith will eventually disappear when it faces trials and sufferings. It will be a dead faith. God does not use such a dead faith to reveal His almighty power.

The faith that God uses is a faith that is alive always either in good times or bad times, either in easy times or troubled times. God wants us to trust in him with a living faith that is alive regardless of circumstances. Here in this text, Jesus teaches us how to build up a living faith.

1. By overcoming influence of unbelief.
2. By remembering what God has done for us.

Overcoming the influence of unbelief

There are two major trends of unbelief which destroy our faith. Jesus calls them “the yeast of the Pharisees” and “the yeast of Herod.” Jesus warns us to watch out for these two yeasts and so protect our faith, and keep it alive. Yeast in the Bible usually signifies an evil or sin which is very small but influences powerfully and destroys our lives. So we must guard ourselves against this yeast.

1 Corinthians 5:6-7 says, ...Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch-as you really are.

What does Jesus mean by “the yeast of the Pharisees” and “the yeast of Herod?” By “yeast,” he meant the influence of the teaching and the lifestyle of the Pharisees and Herod. The reason Jesus calls the teaching and the life style of the Pharisees and Herod “yeast” is because they influence our faith little by little, but have a very strong influence in destroying our faith.

The yeast of the Pharisees is the teaching and practice that man can be righteous through keeping religious rules, regulations and traditions. The Pharisees believed in God and in the Scriptures as God's words for man, but they added rules, regulations, and traditions to God's words.

The Pharisees created many regulations and rules to obey God's words accurately and well. So their intention to make and follow them was good. But when they repeatedly did so, keeping the rules and regulations became fixed religious traditions. And they honored the traditions as much as they honored the Scriptures, or sometimes even more than they honored the Scriptures. They insisted on keeping and obeying the traditions in all circumstances. They judged themselves and others by how well a person could keep the traditions. But it led them to serious errors and destroyed true faith (Matthew 23:1-37).

Their errors were:

1). Salvation by man's merit

It led people to think that their good behavior and their religious rituals and ceremonies made them acceptable to God. It promoted a religion of God's approval and salvation through man's good works and merits. But the Scripture says, man can never be saved by good works or merits. Such religion will destroy our faith.

2). Hypocrisy

It led people to an external religion which emphasizes man's external behavior more than man's internal character. Such external religion made people hypocrites who cared about their outward behaviors rather than caring about what was in their hearts. Hypocrisy seriously weakens our faith.

3). Self-righteousness

It led people to live with an attitude of self-righteousness and pride. If one kept the rules and regulations, he naturally felt righteous. The person might compare himself with others who didn't keep the rules and regulations, and be proud of himself. Such a proud and self-righteous person cannot live by faith in God's grace.

To overcome such destructive influences of the Pharisees' yeast, we have to put our faith firmly upon the truth in the Scriptures.

1). Be righteous not by works but by faith.

We should not ignore the importance of good works. But it is not good works which makes us approved by God. Man can be approved by God as a righteous person only by faith. Good works are byproducts of our faith. Through good works we can glorify God. But the foundation of God's approval is not good works but faith. Salvation comes only through faith, not by works (Romans 1:17).

2). Fear God, who judges man through the things of the heart.

Man has the tendency to judge people through their outward appearance, but God judges everyone according to the condition of their hearts (1Samuel 16:7). Take care of what is in your heart more than taking care of your outward behavior. Seek cleansing of your heart through the blood of Christ, not through your good works. See yourself and others through God's grace (Ephesians 2:5). Be graceful to other people's mistakes and sins as God is graceful to all sinners.

3). Be flexible in applying rules, regulations and traditions

We believers need rules and regulations to obey God's words well and accurately. We must follow them. But we have to be careful not to honor them as we honor the Scriptures. Religious rules, regulations and traditions do not have absolute authority as the Scriptures have. They are relative. We should not regard any religious rules or traditions as

unchangeable truth. We have to be flexible to change them all the time to win lost souls of different generations and of diverse cultures (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

The yeast of Herod is ungodly secularism.

Ungodly secularism seeks happiness and satisfaction of life in man's power, pleasure, and money. It believes that when a person becomes rich, powerful and famous the person can be happy. It believes that the more money, power and fame you gain in this world, the happier you will become. It often rationalizes that to gain more power, more money, you can use any means possible, even if they are immoral or sinful- manipulation, betrayal, compromising the truth with lies etc. (That is why Jesus called Herod "fox."-Luke 13:32).

When it comes to the believers' circle, it teaches that not all the words in the Scriptures are true. It teaches that some of them are just man-made stories. It rejects absolute moral authority of the word of God. It teaches that some words in the Scriptures which define certain behaviors of man as sins should not be understood literally. For example, some people dilute the meaning of God's command on the Sabbath or tithing. They teach that in the modern times, keeping the Sabbath holy is irrelevant. They teach that tithing is required only in the Old Testament times. So today's believers do not need to give the full tithe but may give whatever they want.

So it compromises God's unchangeable, absolute truth with relative rules that can please human reasoning and convenience. The influence of such thoughts and life style is very powerful. It can destroy many Christians' faith.

To overcome Herod's yeast, we have to seek happiness and the purpose of life in spiritual blessings and in God's eternal kingdom. Know that the

power of this world is like grass and flowers which eventually wither. Seek the lasting value of your life in the spiritual kingdom.

In addition, we must take the written Scriptures as God's final and absolute authority over our lives. We should never compromise the truth in the written Scriptures with the teachings of secularism.

Take the words in the written Scriptures as the final authority for judging all human behaviors, attitudes, for judging right and wrong and good and evil.

Remember what the Lord has done

To build up our faith as a living faith, we must constantly remember what the Lord has done in our lives.

The disciples had seen that Jesus multiplied just a few loaves of bread to feed thousands of people. After seeing that, they forgot to bring bread except just one loaf. They started worrying about bread. Their faith became weak.

Jesus reminded them of the fact that he had multiplied bread on two different occasions and fed over 10,000 people.

Why did they worry and argue over one loaf of bread when they had Jesus in the boat with them?

God's people have a tendency to forget his blessings. When they forget it their faith becomes weak. So, God tells his people repeatedly to remember what he has done for them.

Deuteronomy 8:2 Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order

to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

Psalm 105:5 Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced.

God has helped us overcome problems after problems, but when we face a new problem, we forget what God has done. Our faith becomes weak in front of a great problem. We become frightened or depressed.

To revive our weak faith and make it living faith, we must keep remembering the blessed things that the Lord has done in our lives.

A mom, Michelle Johnson, was staying with her son at the hospital to take care of him after a serious surgery. One morning, she was exhausted by staying at the hospital for many days. She slowly walked to the cafeteria for breakfast. But while waiting on the elevator, she realized she was on the 6th floor. The view out the window of the concrete roof held special significance. It was one she'd seen many times before because it was the same view for the six weeks she had seen after her car wreck. The doctors said she'd never walk normally, she'd have arthritis within a year, and she'd have to have a hip replacement within 5 years. None of that happened. Thirty-five years later, the memories of God's faithfulness during those days moved her to tears.

And then she writes, "Do you need a reminder of His faithfulness today? Wouldn't it be cool if we could sit down with some of the men and women in the Bible and talk about their memories of times with God?"

- Wouldn't it be awesome to hear Joseph's rendition of the events that took him from a dreary prison cell to the palace?

- Or...from Daniel as he told how a faithful God kept him alive and unharmed during an entire night in a den of lions?
- What if Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego could show us the clothes they wore in the fiery furnace—without a burn or scorch mark on them, or even the aroma of smoke...?

When you are worrying about things you don't have right now, try to remember what the Lord has done until today. What did he do when you had nothing? What did the Lord do when you were sick and lonely? What did the Lord do when you were in crisis? What did the Lord do when you had no place to go, no person to turn to? What did the Lord do when you were hopeless and helpless?

As long as you remember the Lord who has faithfully taken care of you, you can be sure that he will care for you in all circumstances.