

INCREASED FAITH THE STRENGTH OF PEACE PRINCIPLES

NO. 1318

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“The apostles said to the Lord, increase our faith.”
Luke 17:5.

THE sermon of last Sabbath morning, [#1317, *Overcome Evil with Good*] in which I earnestly endeavored to teach the doctrine of overcoming evil with good, and the frank and full forgiveness of all injuries for Christ's sake, has raised much discussion. I know that it startled a great many of you, and that you have a great many questions among yourselves as to whether such precepts are practicable by ordinary Christians. At that I am not at all surprised, because when our Lord preached the same doctrine, His disciples were so astonished that the apostles exclaimed in surprise, “Lord, increase our faith.” It is most important in this case to see the connection of the text, or you will fail to see its drift and bearings. It was not for the sake of working *miracles* that the apostles sought increased faith; it was not in order to bear their present or future trials, and neither was it to enable them to receive some mysterious article of the faith. Their prayer referred to a common everyday duty enjoined by the gospel—the forgiving those who do us wrong—for the previous verses are to this effect, “Take heed to yourselves. If your brother trespasses against you, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. And if he trespasses against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turns again to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.” And it was upon hearing this that the apostles cried, “Increase our faith.” If you have been surprised, dear friends, at the high standard of Christian duty which my Lord has laid down for you, I only trust your surprise may drive you to the same resort as it did those first servants of the Lord, and compel you to appeal for help to Him who issued the command! Will He not help us in walking in His ways? When we feel that His commandments are exceedingly broad, to whom should we appeal for aid but to Him who is our leader in all holy conversion and godliness? He will not set you the task and refuse you His assistance in performing it!

Observe that these apostles did not, because of their having sinned against this precept in former times, conclude that they had no faith. They did not conclude because the precept was so much above them that therefore they were unbelievers. Despair is no help to Christian duty! To doubt our discipleship will not help us to obey our Lord; if any of you have cut yourselves off from the household of faith because you fall short of the noblest forms of Christian love, I entreat you to begin again, and instead of doubting the existence of your faith ask to have it increased. There is a fountain opened for your past uncleanness—and sanctifying power for your future lives; apply to Jesus at once for the double deliverance, and doubt not that He will deal graciously with you.

Neither did the disciples reject the precept as utterly impossible, nor excuse themselves from it on the ground that in their peculiar circumstances it must be modified. They did not complain that it was too much to expect of human nature, nor did they regard the command as only fit for dwellers in Utopia. No, they respected the precept which surprised them, and admired the virtue which astonished them. As loyal followers of the Lord Jesus, they felt bound to follow where He led the way, for they believed that He was too wise to issue an impossible command, too good to teach an impracticable code of morals, and too honest to set up a standard to which no mortal could in any measure, attain. They looked on His command and they felt such confidence in Him that instead of drawing back they resolved that it should be obeyed at all costs. Their resolve was to do His bidding, but feeling that they could not achieve it in their own strength they began to pray, and their prayer was for faith. They felt that only *faith* could work such a wonder of patient love; it was far out of the ordinary line of action—flesh and blood could not accomplish it, mere resolve would not achieve it—faith must do it and even faith itself would need

strengthening or it would fail in the attempt. They felt also that the kind of faith which could forgive to 70 times seven must be supernatural, and not such as *they* could grow in their own breasts without divine assistance, and therefore they said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.” They needed such faith as He could give in order that they might perform such duties as He enjoined. Beloved, imitate the example of these apostles! Whenever you feel that you have something to do that is beyond you, stop a moment and breathe a prayer for more strength. If ever the leap is too wide, draw back, take a breath, ask for strength, and then, in the name of Him that will surely bear you over it, take your leap and succeed! He has not brought you into a condition in which you shall feel your infirmities so abjectly as to lie down and die, but He does intend you to feel your weakness so much that you may importunately pray for His aid, and then in the strength which you have gained by prayer may attain to heights of virtue which otherwise had been far above and out of your sight. We are all the more likely to rise to holiness when we have seen our own incapacity for it. Those who at the first blush were somewhat staggered by the high and glorious precepts of Christian forgiveness, of non-resistance, and of returning good for evil, are none the less likely to become good practitioners of this holy art, but all the more so if their astonishment drives them to pray, “Lord, increase our faith.”

Let us then, this morning, in that connection, *consider the prayer of the text*; let us, secondly, *see how it bears upon the duty of forgiveness*, how the increase of faith can help us to forgive; and then, thirdly let us *note how our Lord Jesus answered this prayer*. O divine Spirit, lead us into these truths of God while we meditate together, and afterwards help us to show in our lives the mind of Christ.

I. First, LET US CONSIDER THE PRAYER ITSELF. It may help us to see its meaning if we consider for a moment *where the apostles learned to pray like this*. Who suggested to them to say, “Lord, increase our faith”? Now, faith is the *act* of man—truly, it is the *gift* of God, but it is as surely the act of man. God does not believe for us, the Holy Spirit does not believe in our place—the man himself believes. This would be clear enough to the apostles, but they might not so readily learn that Jesus had power to give and to increase faith. It is assuredly most proper to ask the Lord to increase our faith, but it was not very early in their Christian career that the apostles did so pray; in fact, it is a very singular fact that I think this is almost the only instance in which, as an apostolic company, they asked any *spiritual* thing of the Master! They did say, “Lord, teach us how to pray,” but I am afraid they meant to learn a *form* of prayer rather than to be filled with the spirit of prayer. As to spiritual blessings, our Lord might well say to them, “To this point you have asked *nothing* in My name.” But they were at last so overwhelmed with a consciousness of their own weakness when they perceived the exceeding breadth and height of the law of Christian forgiveness, that they felt assured that there must be strength laid up for them somewhere or other! And where could it be but in their Lord? And so they prayed to the Lord, “increase our faith.” It is not the only time in which a sense of their personal emptiness has convinced men of the divine fullness, and driven them to it.

I think it was Jesus who had taught them to pray so. They must have caught the idea from that which is recorded in the 11th of Mark, at the 22nd verse, where you have much the same passage as the one before us, though expressed in different words. “Jesus answering said unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, that whoever shall say unto this mountain, Be you removed, and be you cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he said shall come to pass, he shall have whatever he said. Therefore I say unto you, What things you desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them. And when you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.” Note that our Lord according to Mark commenced this exhortation concerning forgiveness by saying, “Have faith in God”; then showed the power of faith in working wonders, and especially in obtaining answers to prayer, and last of all commanded forgiveness of trespasses. Was not that sentence “Have faith in God” the mother of their prayer “Increase our faith”? Jesus had said “Have faith,” and now when they fully understand what it is that He teaches, they take the words out of His mouth, and they say to their Lord, “Add to our faith. We trust we have some of that precious grace, but add to it yet more and more, we beseech You.” Our Master in His teaching was continually connecting the forgiveness of others with the

exercise of faith. In the passage just referred to, and in that which surrounds my text, you have our Lord referring to the faith which moves mountains, or plucks up sycamore trees by the roots—and coupling with it the forgiving of offenses. Surely this may have led them so to pray.

Our Lord had also suggested this prayer for faith from the fact that as He had taught them that there must be faith in prayer, so He had also insisted upon it that prayer must always be connected with a forgiving spirit; in fact, in the model prayer, according to which we are always to shape our petitions, He has taught us to say, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,” or, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.” He has allowed us, as it were, to cut out for ourselves the measure of pardon that we wish to receive—and the measure is to be precisely that which we are prepared to give to others! God will pardon us in proportion as we are prepared to pardon. If you have a trespass which you cannot pardon, God also has an unpardonable sin written in His book against you: I mean unpardonable as long as you are unforgiving. If you will only pardon slowly, and after a stingy fashion, you shall not for many days enjoy the freeness and the bounty of the unlimited mercy of God! So you see as our Lord had connected success in prayer both with forgiveness and faith, he had suggested the increase of the one with the view of accomplishing the other. No man can pray successfully while he is in an unforgiving frame of mind, but a believing man always prays successfully, therefore a believing man is ready to forgive. As faith increases we become more able to overlook the provocations we endure.

I think that the apostles had also learned this prayer, not only from the Master, but from one who was very much inferior to themselves, but who nevertheless had outrun them in the knowledge of the struggles of the heart—I mean the father who had a lunatic child. That was a wonderful prayer of his, when Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him that believes.” The poor man cried out, “Lord, I believe, help You my unbelief.” This was a deeply experimental prayer. It showed how familiar he was to the workings of his own soul. He detected unbelief in his own heart and yet he saw faith there too; whereas a great many Christians, if they discern some unbelief in their hearts, straightway imagine that there cannot be any faith, And if they possess a degree of faith, they fancy that there cannot be any unbelief surviving—whereas the two powers are in one man at the same time, and contend within his soul. The apostles appear to me to have learned a noble lesson from that tried father, and now they put his prayer into their own language, and use it on their own account. They do as good as confess their lingering unbelief, and yet they acknowledge that they do believe while they pray, “Lord, increase our faith”; so that with the teaching of Jesus, and with the example of that poor struggling soul, they had been taught to pray as they should. It is a grand thing when every day we learn to pray better, and both from the Master’s lips and from the experience of all, His servants are being taught what to pray for as we ought. By the use of such means the Spirit helps our infirmity, and teaches us how to prevail with God.

Now let us come a little closer to the prayer itself, and notice *what it confesses*. It confesses that they *had* faith, for they say, “Lord, *increase* our faith.” He who asks for faith must *have* some faith, or he would not ask at all; indeed, it is with faith that we ask for faith. He who pleads, “Add to my faith,” acknowledges that he has some already, to which more is to be added. So that these apostles, notwithstanding that they were staggered by the duty before them, believed that Christ could help them through it, and also believed that He could *at once* give them the necessary faith. When you ask for any blessing, always do so in such a way as to acknowledge what you have already received. Do not despise the little faith you have, even though you feel bound to plead for more. They also confessed that while they had faith they had not enough of it. My brethren, must we not all make the same confession? You believe in Jesus Christ to the salvation of your soul, but, brethren, do you believe to the comfort of your heart? You have faith enough to bear the ordinary trials of life, but, dear brethren, have you enough for the superior contests to which you have lately been called? If you have not, then here is the prayer for you, “Lord, increase my faith.” Certain it is that no one among us has too much faith, or even enough should unusual storms arise. We have no faith to spare. God grants it to us always according to our day, and He gives more grace and faith when He *sends more trials*. Often, when our faith is sorely tried, we are compelled to feel as mere babes in faith’s school, and need indeed to pray daily, “Lord, increase our faith.”

But then by their prayer the apostles confessed that they could not increase their own faith. Faith is not a weed to grow upon every dunghill, without care or culture; it is a plant of *heavenly* growth, and requires divine watching and watering. He who is the author of faith and the finisher of it, is the only one who can increase it. As no man ever obtains his first faith apart from the Spirit of God, so no man ever gets more faith except through the working of that same divine power! The Spirit which rests upon Jesus must anoint us also, or the measure of faith will not be enlarged. Breathe then the prayer to God, my brethren, "Increase my faith"; this will be a far wiser course than to resolve in your own strength, "I will believe more," for, perhaps, in rebuke of your pride you will fall into a decaying state, and even believe less. After having made so vainglorious a resolution, you may fall into grievous despondency; do not therefore say, "I will accumulate more faith," but pray, "Lord, I believe, help You my unbelief." Herein is your wisdom!

The prayer also confesses that the Lord Jesus can increase faith. Dear brethren, the Lord Jesus Christ can increase your faith by the use of common means, through His Spirit. He is able to make all grace abound towards you. Not by any magical mode, nor by miracle, but even by such things as you have, the Lord can make Little-Faith grow into Greatheart, and turn Feeble-Mind into Valiant-for-Truth. He has the key of faith, and can open more of its chambers, and fill them with His treasures. He can reveal truths of God to you which shall cause you to believe more fully, or the truth of God already revealed He can set in clearer light, and apply more powerfully to your heart, and so can add to your faith. Do not believe, brethren, that you are condemned to lead an unbelieving life. No such necessity exists. Let no one among you sit down and say, "I have a withered arm of faith, and cannot stretch it out," or "I have a weak eye, and shall never be able to see afar off." No, the name of our God is Jehovah Rophi, and He can heal us of all these ills! God can make you strong, brethren. Present again and again the prayer "Lord increase our faith," with the full conviction that He can do so to any extent, and that He can lift even the most drooping soul among us into the full assurance of faith! May the Lord at this very hour work in you a childlike confidence in His love and faithfulness, and may you never be the victim of mistrust again!

I want you to observe *who prayed this prayer*. It is not often that the evangelists speak of "the apostles," separately, as asking anything. You will perceive in the first verse that our Lord spoke to the disciples. "Then said He to the disciples," but the persons who sought increased faith were the *apostles*. "The church *did not* think themselves infallible? Fancy the successor of Peter saying, "Lord, increase our faith!" Surely, "His Holiness" needs no increase of faith! He who boasts that he is infallible cannot be unbelieving! Ah, brethren, the apostles knew nothing of such silly and wicked pretensions; none of them ever in their lives pretended to be the "Head of the Church" or "Vicar of Christ"; but they were ready to cry to their Master for increase of faith just as soon as the rest of the disciples, yes, sooner too, because they were the first to feel their need. They were the choice of the Lord's flock, and therefore they were the first to see and to confess their own failures. No man so soon knows and so much deplors his need of faith as the man who has most of it. It was not the little ones in the church who said, "Increase our faith"—they might well say it; but it was the masters in Israel who had been best instructed by Christ, who had seen His miracles and preached His word; these were the very ones who cried to their Lord, "Increase our faith." The nearer you live to God, and the more full your soul is of faith, the less inclined will you be to be self-satisfied; and the more earnestly will you desire that your faith should be increased.

It is somewhat remarkable that the whole of the apostles thus prayed. They were unanimous in this prayer, though it did not often happen that they were so in anything else. There were divisions among them, and strifes as to who among them should be the greatest; but this time they were all one in the petition to the Lord. A petition which commended itself to the entire college of the apostles is one which surely all of us may put up to our great Lord in the presence of that supreme duty, of which we heard last Sunday morning. In order that we may not resist evil, but overcome evil with good, be pleased, O Lord, to increase our faith.

While I am still explaining the prayer, let us notice once again *why they asked for faith*. They said unto the Lord, "Increase our faith." Might they not more fitly have said, "Lord, increase our meekness,

Lord, increase our Christian love”? No, but they went to the bottom of the thing, they looked to the mainspring of all Christian graces—they asked for *faith*. Sometimes, brethren, we are led to see that if a duty is to be performed at all it cannot be done in the strength of nature. Now the grace which deals with the supernatural is faith, therefore we say, “Lord, increase our faith, for since this is a supernatural virtue which You do ask of us, be pleased to give us the faculty which deals with supernatural power that we may be enabled to achieve this high and difficult duty.” I know some of you think that faith was given to men of old, that they might work miracles, and you have admired the faith of Samson when he slew the Philistines with the jawbone of an ass, the faith which “quenched the violence of fire,” the faith which “stopped the mouths of lions,” and so on. Yes, but faith is meant for other matters besides miracles. The faith which enables a Christian to live a holy life, especially the faith that will enable you not to be overcome of evil but to overcome evil with good, and to forgive your neighbor to 70 times seven is as great a faith as that which of old stopped the sun and divided the sea. It seems to be thought by some that faith nowadays is only meant to be used to raise money so that we may support orphanages and colleges by obtaining answers to prayer. Well, these are noble deeds, and the faith which accomplishes them brings great glory to God. May God give to His servants who are called to such work more and more success, for such works are a standing testimony to a skeptical world that God *does* hear prayer; but after all the feats which the most of you are to perform are neither miracles nor the maintenance of orphanages, but deeds of love in common life. You have not to stop the mouths of lions, but you have the equally difficult task of stopping your own mouths when you are in an angry temper; you are not called to quench the violence of fire, except as it burns in your own wrath; you have to smite no Philistine but your own sins, and cast down no walls but your own prejudices. Christian woman, your faith has to work its miracles in the drawing room, in the parlor, in the kitchen, in the chamber. Man of business, your faith is to perform its marvels on the exchange, or in the shop, or in the commercial room. Working man, you are to achieve your wonders at the forge, or by the bench, or in the field, or in the mill. Here is your sphere of service, and you have need to lift to heaven the prayer of the apostles—“Lord, increase our faith,” that you may live worthily, righteously, soberly, and after a Christian sort.

II. Secondly, I want to show HOW THE INCREASE OF FAITH BEARS UPON OUR POWER TO FORGIVE OTHERS. And I would answer first, that *I think you already see that it does*, although you cannot explain the mode of its operation. If I were to bring before you a person of whom I might say, “This man is strong in faith,” you would feel certain that he would be a man who would readily forgive the injuries of others. Though you do not see the connection between the two, you are very conscious that there must be such a connection. Now, when I tell you of Abraham, how when the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot quarreled, Abraham did not quarrel with Lot, but finding that they must separate, gave Lot, his junior, the choice as to which way he would go. It seems natural that Abraham should act in that gentle manner. That calm quiet believing man of God—you have only to look into his majestic face and feel quite certain that he will act with great gentleness and nobleness of soul. Joseph, the man so full of faith that he gave commandment concerning his bones—when his brothers came before him and he made himself known to them, and wept over them and forgave them—you feel that such conduct is just what you might expect from Joseph; the very fact that he was so true a believer in God makes you feel that he will not seek to avenge himself, though he had been shamefully treated by his unbrotherly brothers. Moses was so meek, so gentle, that you trace his meekness at once to his faith. And David, when you see him standing over sleeping Saul, and hear his companion say, “Let me smite him but this once”; but David will not allow the deed to be done, but leaves his enemy in the hands of God, you say to yourself, “I expected such conduct of David, for he is a truly believing man of God.” Though you have not satisfactorily traced out the connection between the two, yet you know very well that if a man professes to be a believer in Christ you expect him to be gentle and forgiving—and you are right! And there is an actual connection between the two, which we shall, I doubt not, see directly.

When the apostles said, “Lord, increase our faith,” they meant, “*Increase our confidence in You*,” and this is a very material help towards the performance of the duty. First, God must help us so to believe in Jesus that we may not suspect Him of setting us an impracticable task. The Lord has said, “Overcome evil with good,” and has bid us “Forgive 70 times seven times”; do you not feel ready to

say, "This is a hard saying, who can bear it?" Do we not fancy that we shall never get through the world in that gentle fashion? It is our *unbelief* which tells us that we must sometimes bend our fists, or at least sometimes deliver our minds with great vigor of wrath, or else we shall be trod down like mire in the streets. We need to ask for divine grace that we may be helped to believe that Christ's way of forgiveness is after all the best way, the noblest way, the most truly manly and the most surely happy way.

Their prayer may be read as meaning "Lord, help us to believe that You can enable us to do this. We cannot by our own unaided nature be always forgiving, lowly, gentle and loving in temper, but You have said, 'Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and you shall find rest unto your souls.' Therefore, O Lord, give us more faith in You that we may believe that You can make us meek and lowly, even as You are." We ought to believe that Jesus can turn our lion-like tempers into lambs, and our raven-like spirits into doves, and if we have not faith enough for that we must pray for it—for do you not see that if a man believes a duty to be impossible, or judges that grace itself cannot enable him to do it, then he never will do it; but when he obtains a confidence that the command is within his power, or that it can be obeyed by a force which is within his reach, *then* he has won half the battle already! In believing in the possibility of a high standard of holiness, a man is already on his way towards that holiness! I therefore earnestly exhort you to ask for more faith, that you may believe the duty of constant forgiveness to be possible of accomplishment through divine grace.

But, next, between *faith and forgiveness a very close connection will be seen if we inquire what the foundation of faith is?* Listen a moment. Faith believes that God for Christ's sake forgives us—and how much? Seventy times seven? Beloved, God forgives us much more than that. And does the Lord forgive us seven times a day? If seven times a day we offend Him and repent, does He forgive? Yes, that He does. This is to be unquestionably believed, and I believe it; I believe that, as often as I transgress, God is more ready to forgive me than I am ready to offend, though, alas, I am all too ready to transgress. Have you right thoughts of God, dear hearer? If so, then you know that He is a tender Father willing to wipe the tear of penitence away, and press His offending child to His bosom, and kiss them with the kisses of His forgiving love. The mercy of God lies at the very foundation of our faith; and surely it wonderfully helps us to forgive. Don't you see at once, O forgiven one that the natural inference is that if the Lord has forgiven you your 10,000 talents of debt, you dare not go and take your brother by the throat for the hundred pence which he owes you, but you must forgive him because God for Christ's sake has forgiven you!

Notice again, that *the joy of faith is a wonderful help to forgiveness.* Do you remember when you were first converted? I remember well the first day in which I believed in Jesus Christ; do you not also remember your own spiritual birthday? Recall then the love of your espousals, the happy honeymoon of your spiritual life. Could you forgive your enemy then? Why, you thought nothing of injuries: you were so happy and joyful in the Lord that if anybody tried to irritate you they could not do it, or if you became a little annoyed for a minute, you soon came back to your moorings again. You were too full of holy joy to indulge in quarrelling. Dear brethren, do you not know that you ought *always* to have retained that love and joy, and that the best thing you can do is to get them back if you have lost them! Therefore, pray today, "Lord, increase my faith, restore unto me once again the joy of Your salvation." When you return from your backsliding, and rejoice in the Lord with all your heart, you will find it easy enough to forgive your worst foe.

Again, it is quite certain that *a spirit of rest is created by faith, which greatly aids the gentle spirit.* The man or woman who believes enters into rest, and becomes calm of spirit, and this keeps him from seeking petty revenges. He knows that whatever happens all is right forever; he knows whom he has believed, and he walks in the integrity of his heart, and therefore he is not a man that is likely to be irritated. It is amazing when you are sure you are right with how much you can put up with! Good Joseph Hughes, of Battersea, was one of the founders of the Bible Society, and one of the most earnest workers for it. He was riding on a coach upon a dreadfully cold, bitter winter's day, and at his side sat a talkative person, who thought himself a gentleman. As the coach proceeded, he began talking about religion in general and denouncing Bible Societies in particular. With a sprinkling of swearing he went on to say that such societies were founded to reward lazy secretaries, and other officials. "Those fellows," he said,

“get fine salaries, and then they go traveling all about the country, enjoying themselves, and charging a pretty penny for their traveling expenses. I understand they always travel in the best style.” Mr. Hughes quietly replied, “But what would you say, sir, if you were informed by one of the secretaries that he never received a farthing for his services, and that in order to save money for the Society, he rode on the top of the coach on a cold day like this so that he might not pay as much as he would have to do if he went inside? Now, sir,” said he, “one of them is doing this before your eyes.” Now you can understand how Mr. Hughes could be very cool, and allow the talkative man to proceed as long as he liked with his lies, because he knew he had so crushing an answer for him; and so when faith gives perfect rest to the soul a man is not easily disturbed, for he knows that behind all there is a blessing which will compensate for present annoyances. Conscious strength removes us from the temptations which surround petty feebleness. May God give you that increased faith which shall fix your heart in the sphere of perfect satisfaction in the Lord and patient waiting for His will, and so shall you cease to fret yourself because of evil-doers.

Again, *faith, when it is strong has a high expectancy about it, which helps it to bear with the assaults of men of the world.* “What,” she says—“what matters that which happens to me here, for I am on my journey, and I shall soon be in the glory land, where I shall have a reward for all my travail by being forever with the Lord.” A man readily puts up with the little inconvenience of the present when he has great joys in store for the future. If you stay at an inn for a while when you are on a journey, it is only for a night, and though things may not be very comfortable, you say, “Well, I am not going to live here a week, I shall be gone in the morning; it does not matter, I am looking forward to my sweet home at my journey’s end.” So does faith, by its blessed expectation of the future, make the troubles of the present to be very light, so that she bears them without fretfulness and anger. May the Holy Spirit cause faith thus to work in us.

III. But my time has gone sooner than I desired, and therefore I must close by noticing in the third place HOW THE LORD JESUS CHRIST ANSWERED THE PRAYER FOR INCREASED FAITH. He did it in two ways.

First, *by assuring them that faith can do anything.* The Lord said, “If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you might say unto this sycamore tree, be you plucked up by the root and be you planted in the sea, and it should obey you.” I think He meant that to be understood as a proverbial expression, to signify that faith can accomplish anything. You say, “Ah, my bad temper is rooted in me: as a sycamore tree takes hold of the earth by its roots, so an ill temper has gone into the very depth of my nature. I am constitutionally quick-tempered. From my very birth I have found it hard to forgive.” If you have faith, my brother, you can say to that sycamore tree, or better still, upas tree within you, “Be you plucked up by the roots.” “But,” says one, “with such a nature as mine, such a changeable, excitable, nervous disposition as mine, you cannot expect to plant in me the tree which bears the fruit of calm, quiet forgiveness.” What says our Lord? “You shall say to that sycamore tree, be you planted in the sea.” A strange place for a tree to be planted! In the sea! Indeed, it is an impossible thing, because every wave would shake its roots out of their places; the substance is too unsubstantial, the liquid of the sea is too moveable for a single tree to grow in it. Our Lord says, “If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed it should obey you.” You can by faith plant a tree in the sea—and so can you plant this fruit-bearing glorious tree of love to God and love to man within your frail nature, if you have but faith enough. Brethren, we do not need to be moving mountains. If mountains required moving, I have no doubt faith would move them, but the mountains are in the best possible places they can be, and therefore why should we uproot them? We do not require to transplant sycamore trees by faith, for there are plenty of workmen to be had to lift them up, and carry them carefully to another place, and it would be a pity that we should use faith so as to deprive poor men of their means of livelihood; but I doubt not it would be done if it were necessary. Now, there is room enough in the *moral* and *spiritual* world for faith, and *there* she can work her miracles. We can say to our bad disposition, “Be plucked up by the roots,” and it will be done; and if we have faith in God we can have the right disposition, the quiet, calm spirit implanted in us. Do you believe this? If you do not, then you have not the faith, and you shall not see it, but, if you believe, it is possible to you.

Once more, how did Christ answer the prayer? He answered it in a very remarkable manner, as I think, *by teaching them humility*. He said to them in effect, “You think that if you were to forgive to 70 times seven you would be doing a great deal. You fancy that if you were never to return evil for evil, but always to be gentle and loving, you would be somebody, and that God would almost be in debt to you: but it is not so.” And then He went on to tell them that the servant, when he is sent to plow or to attend to the cattle is not thanked. While he is doing his labor his master does not come to him and wonder at him as if he were doing some very extraordinary thing. The master does not hold up his hands in amazement and cry, “How well my servant can plow, how cleverly he feeds the oxen,” and he does not go to him and say, “My dear, invaluable servant, I am sure I do not know what I would do without you, therefore come and sit down, and I will wait upon you.” Oh, no, if he works well he only does his own work and nobody else’s; He does what he is bound to do, and the master does not think of praising him, and feasting him. So says Christ, “So likewise you, when you shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.” This mode of increasing our faith reminds me of the hydropath way of strengthening some people by pouring cold water upon the spine of their backs. The parable of the servant and his lord shows us our true place, and the small value which we may attach to our own services. It takes the man who thinks, “Oh, it is a great thing to forgive everybody, and if I were to do it I should be a great saint,” and it pours a torrent of cold water upon his pride, by saying, “No, if you did it you would not be anything amazing, it is only what is your *duty* to do, you would have no reason to go about the world blowing your trumpet, and saying, ‘What a wonderful martyr I am,’ you would only then have fulfilled a common duty.” Well now, it seems to me that this is a wonderful strengthener to my faith. I feel resolved within my spirit thus—“My Lord and Master, I will no more say of anything You bid me to do, ‘This is beyond my reach,’ but I will pray, ‘My Lord, increase my faith till I can do it, till I can live up to Your standard, for even if I should do so by Your grace, yet considering what You have done for me, considering what I owe You, considering the power of Your blessed Spirit that dwells within me, considering the richness of the ultimate reward which You will surely give me, though it is of grace and not of debt, all I could do, if I could be zealous as a seraph, and perfect as the saints in heaven, would be too little, and I would have to confess that I am an unprofitable servant, and I would have done no more than it was my duty to have done.”

I pray God the Holy Spirit to let this sermon come on the back of the discourse of last Sunday, that you may not look upon the first as being impracticable, but may gather strength from the second to go and put into practice what you have learned. May God bless you for Christ’s sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—MATTHEW 18:19-35; LUKE 17:1-10.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—173, 626, 533.

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