

It Takes Faith

Matthew 6:5-15

Lent 3, March 27, 2019

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Faith is either in one's own good works or in Christ Jesus. There is nowhere else for faith to be.

If you trust in your good works and think that you are good enough to be saved, then you have faith in your good works and therefore faith in yourself. If you think that your good works outweigh your sins, then you have faith in your good works. You trust in them to be saved. If you think that you are not as bad as other people are and you have a list of other people of whom you think that you are not as bad as them, then you trust in your good works to be saved. Your faith is in your good works. If you believe in a god who promises to reward in you this life and in the life to come for your good works, then even though you believe in a god, you are actually trusting in your good works and so your faith is in your good works.

The only other place for faith to be is in Jesus. Only Jesus offered the atoning sacrifice that takes away the sin of the world. And since Jesus is the only one to have offered an atoning sacrifice that takes away the sin of the whole world, He is the only one who has offered the atoning sacrifice for your sins. Therefore if you rely on Jesus and His sacrifice and subsequent resurrection to save you, then you believe in Jesus. Your faith is in Jesus and what He accomplished for you. People who have faith in Jesus do not need to prove to God that they are good. People who believe in Jesus do not rely on their good works or basic goodness to save them. People who have faith in Jesus are not afraid to confess their sins. After all Jesus has atoned for their sins, why should they fear their sins?

It takes faith to pray in secret with the door shut in the inner room. You won't do that unless you believe.

For a person who trusts in their good works and whose faith is in their good works, they cannot go into the inner room and shut the door and pray to their Father who is in secret. If they pray to their Father who is in secret, will their good deeds be counted? Their righteousness may not be seen, if they pray in this fashion.

Therefore those who rely on their good deeds do not believe in God at all even if they say that they do. Even if they say that God exists, they do not actually believe that, if they have to pray in public on the street corners and in other public places so that people may see them. They are seeking their reward for their good deeds from men and not from God. Thereby they confess that God does not exist, even if they say that He does exist.

If they believed that He existed and that He accepts people by His grace and mercy and not because of their good deeds, then they would have nothing to prove. They would have no righteousness that they would need to show. They would have no trouble going into the inner room and closing the door and praying to their Father who is in secret. After all who counts more than their Father in heaven, if they really believe in God?

It takes faith to get right to the point when you pray.

For a person who does not have faith, but relies on his own good works to be saved, he has to prove how righteous he is. Prayer then becomes a means for such a person to prove how righteous he is. But if he is going to prove how righteous he is by his prayers, he has to pray long prayers. He cannot afford to get right to the point. He must go on and on in his prayers to prove to God that he is a righteous prayer of prayers. He must be elaborate in his prayers and fancy in his speech to God when he prays. He cannot afford to make short prayers. He must impress God with his prayers. He cannot afford to pray a liturgical prayer which gets right to the point and stops. He cannot afford to pray liturgical prayers that have been written by other people. How will it prove his righteousness if he prays prayers that were written by other people? No! A person who trusts in his own righteousness and good deeds before God must make up his own prayers. He must pray from his own heart in order to prove to God that he knows how to pray and that he can make up his own prayers and that he is good at making up his own prayers.

I once knew a preacher who prayed in this fashion and you never knew when he was going to stop talking. He went on and on and on. One time I had trouble staying awake during Divine Service while he went on and on praying something that he was making up on the spot.

Only a person who has faith can get right to the point when he prays. Only a person who believes in Jesus and therefore feels no need to prove his own righteousness can pray a prayer that is short and to the point. Only such a person who has faith in Jesus has the confidence that God hears him no matter how long or how fancy his prayers are. In fact a person who has faith in Jesus does not need to make long and fancy prayers. He feels no need to because he believes that Jesus will receive his prayer in grace and mercy even if he prays the prayer incorrectly. He believes that the Spirit intercedes with inexpressible groans when we do not know what to pray.

Therefore only a person who has faith will pray the Lord's Prayer. Only a person who has faith will pray a prayer like the Lord's Prayer that has short petitions that get right to the point. The prayer is not flowery. It is not eloquent by human standards. It covers everything in the proper way.

It takes faith to pray, give us this day our daily bread.

A person who trusts in his own righteousness is never sure whether or not God will give him his daily bread. Therefore a person who trusts in his own righteousness believes that he has to provide himself with his daily bread. He will therefore store up things and hoard things so that he has enough for today and enough for tomorrow.

Only a person who has faith in Jesus will pray for his daily bread and no more. A person who believes in Jesus is confident of God's favor both today and tomorrow and for eternity. Such a person does not need to worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself. He

is content to pray for his bread this day knowing that tomorrow he can ask for that day's bread and God will give it.

It takes faith to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

A person who relies on his good works to be saved has to prove his righteousness to God. He has to prove that he is a good person. He has to prove that he is a worthy person. A person who does not believe in Jesus has to do these things because he does not believe that Jesus has forgiven him of his sins. A person who relies on his good works to be saved therefore cannot afford to pray forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us because he must make use of any means necessary to prove his own righteousness. Not only will he not ask for forgiveness because that would be an admission of fault on his part which he cannot afford to do if he trusts in his own good deeds, but he certainly cannot ask that God would forgive him the way that he forgives others. If a person who relies on his good works must make use of all means possible to prove to God how good he is, then he must make use of other people to prove to God how good he is. He must point out to God how unrighteous they are in order to make himself appear more righteous in the eyes of God. Such a person cannot afford to forgive other people. He has to hold their sins against them in order to prove to God how unrighteous they are and by contrast how righteous he is. So a person without faith in Jesus will never pray, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." If he says the words, he is just saying them in front of others in order to be seen by them so that he will appear righteous in their sight.

A person who believes in Jesus knows that his sins are forgiven already. Therefore he has no problem asking Jesus for what he already knows that Jesus will give him. Such a person does not need to prove his own righteousness before God. He does not need to appear righteous in the eyes of God. He can afford to confess his sins and so he is not afraid to confess that he has sins by asking for forgiveness. Such a person also feels no need to use others to prove that he is righteous. He feels no need to point out to God how unrighteous other people are so that he can appear more righteous in the eyes of God. Therefore the man who believes in Jesus will not keep track of other people's sins. He will not keep track of their sins not because God forbids him from keeping track of other people's sins, but because there is no need for him to keep track of other people's sins. There is no need to keep track of their sins unless you are using them to make yourself look righteous, but the person who believes in Jesus feels no need to make himself look righteous in the eyes of others.

Since such a person is not keeping track of other people's sins, it is easy to forgive them. It is therefore easy to attach his own forgiveness to how he forgives others. Therefore it is easy for him to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

And for those of you who are not interested in the Gospel of Christ and really don't care about it and want things in simple terms without the comforting theology of the Scriptures here

it is in simple plain language: if you don't forgive the sins of others, your heavenly Father will not forgive you and you are going to hell. If you do forgive the sins of others, then your heavenly Father will forgive you. And if you think that its works righteous to say that, then you have not been paying attention.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Chancel Drama:

Narrator

Three people at least one of which is a woman

Narrator: In anger his former friend struck him across the face. In speaking about the incident he says:

Person One: He'll get my forgiveness, but not until he deserves it.

Narrator: A woman was in her sister's wedding as a bridesmaid. While they were getting dressed for the wedding the bride said something insulting to her in front of all of the other bridesmaids. After the wedding was over, she said:

Person Two: I forgive her –I just don't want to have anything to do with her again!"

Narrator: A man was robbed. The police caught the robber and jailed him, but the stolen goods were lost. The robber was in prison and unable to return what he had taken.

Person Three: I'll forgive him, but not until he's suffered for a while.