

**What does Jesus say about “faith”?**  
**A series on faith: part 6**

The ministry of Jesus Christ provides a rich source of information about God and ourselves. On the surface are explicit statements that reveal clearly what He wants us to know; at a deeper level are implications that are more penetrating and humbling.

When speaking of “faith”, Jesus meant a belief based on reality of His deity and the One prophesized by Moses and the Old Testament prophets. “Faith” was not a hypothetical abstraction.

“You men of little faith” (Matt 8:23-27; Mark 4:37-41; Luke 8:22-25)

While sailing across the Sea of Galilee, a sudden storm alarms the disciples who, fearful of drowning, awaken Jesus for help. Jesus rebukes them and calms the sea.

Despite demonstrating His power over the natural world by physical healing and the demonic world by exorcism, the disciples did not fully realize who Jesus was.

In stilling the storm, Jesus assumed the authority exercised only by God in the Old Testament (Ps 89:8-9; 106:8-9; 107:23-32), and causes the disciple to question, “Who is this?”

“You men of little faith” (Matt 16:5-12; Mark 8:16-21)

After leaving the Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus warned the disciples about their teaching figuratively as “yeast.” However, the disciples failed to understand this and thought He was referring to food which they had forgotten.

Despite experiencing the previous two miraculous feedings (Matt 14:13-21; 15:29-38; Mark 6:35-44; 8:1-9), the disciples failed to understand that Jesus was God. “Do you not see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear?” “Do you not yet understand?” The disciples failed to trust Jesus for the provision of food.

Jesus clearly spoke of “faith” as a belief in the reality of His deity. Miraculous events that were witnessed and experienced by the disciples corresponded to the truth that Jesus was God.

Common in many of the miracle healings that Jesus performed is His reference to the faith of the sick person or the petitioner for healing. While these saving acts were part of Jesus’ commission (John 7:1-12) and a witness of His deity, they confirmed an existing faith. What is it about the faith of these people that is worthy of Jesus’ comment?

The Centurion (Matt 8:5-13; Luke 7:2-10)

While imploring Jesus to heal his servant, the centurion prevents Jesus from coming to his home, because of his unworthiness to have such a guest let alone even approach Him. In contrast, Jewish elders appealed to Jesus because they thought the centurion worthy of Jesus’ help!

Healing of the Paralytic (Matt 9:2-7; Mark 2:3-12; Luke 5:17-25)

Four men are determined to help their paralytic friend and go to extreme lengths to present their friend before Jesus. It was largely believed in the Jewish community that illness was a consequence of sin (Ps 41:4), so it was likely that they knew, at least in the back of their mind, that their friend’s sin(s) that caused the condition would be forgiven. Yet it was the teachers of the Law who considered Jesus’ pronouncement as blasphemy.

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The woman who bled for 12 years (Matt 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48)

Presuming that the woman, who bled for 12 years, suffered from some type of menstrual hemorrhage, she would have been considered unclean and anyone touching her would have been unclean (Lev 15:25-30). Yet she touched Jesus on the conviction that she would be healed.

When called out, she trembled with fear fell at His feet aware of what happened to her. She was made ceremoniously clean, which she knew only God could do; she knew Jesus was the Messiah.

Two blind men (Matt 9:27-30)

Two blind men follow Jesus (that must have been difficult!) and called out to Him by His messianic lineage “Son of David.” When asked if they believed that Jesus could restore their sight, the blind men affirmed His deity, “yes, Lord.”

Unbelief in Nazareth (Matt 13:54-58; Mark 6:1-6)

Jesus’ hometown failed to recognize His Deity and refused to believe that the carpenter’s son was the Messiah. The wisdom shared by Jesus was disparaged, and He was seen as simply a peer. As the result few miracles were preformed there.

The Syrophoenician woman (Matt 15:22-28; Mark 7:25-30)

A Gentile woman whose daughter is possessed beseeches Jesus by identifying His Deity and messianic lineage, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David...” She is perceptive enough to recognized demonization and the only way to exorcized it. Not only does she clearly knows who Jesus is, but she is certainly aware of her position with Him. For that faith, her daughter is healed.

The demon possessed boy (Matt 17:14-21; Mark 9:17-27; Luke 9:38-43)

After the disciples failed to heal his son, a man falls to his knees and begs Jesus, “Lord, have mercy on my son,..” Jesus challenges the father’s faith, and he genuinely professes his faith in Jesus. The man additionally asks Jesus to help him with his weakness, and he witnesses the miracle. But Jesus’ real criticism about faith was directed towards His disciples who saw the power of exorcism as their own; they had forgotten the object of their faith.

The blind man Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43)

Bartimaeus pleads with Jesus and recognizes His messianic lineage used for the first time in the book of Mark. Bartimaeus expresses his genuine faith and trust in Jesus’ ability with “Rabboni,” which means “my Lord, my Master.” And his vision is restored.

The woman who washed His feet with her hair (Luke 7:40-50)

In the parable of the two debtors, the Pharisee Simon is contrasted with a sinful woman. Representing the debtor with the greatest debt, the woman stood behind Jesus and anointed His feet with perfume (instead of His head!). In respect and submission of His deity, she washes and kisses His feet. In stark contrast, the host and Pharisee Simon failed to offer even the most minimal courtesies to his guest. For her faith, she is saved.

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Increase our faith! (Luke 17:1-10)

While no miracle occurs here, this incident does provide an insight as to Jesus' concept of faith. In this discussion about sin, the apostles learn what forgiveness really means. Jesus' concept of unlimited and complete forgiveness of a brother who repents is beyond their comprehension, “increase our faith!” Jesus points out that the issue is not about the quantity of faith but the kind of faith; just a little of the right kind. The disciples cannot completely forgive a brother by faith in their own ability but only through their faith in Jesus.

The subsequent story of the slave and his master illustrates the attitude and position of the disciple in regard to Jesus and emphasizes the concept of grace.

The ten lepers (Luke 17:12-19)

Ten lepers call out for mercy, and Jesus, without touching them, instructs them to show themselves to the priests. On the way to the priests, all ten are healed! Yet only one, a Samaritan (descendant of mixed Jew and Gentile heritage), returns to prostrate himself and give thanks. The Samaritan recognized that Jesus was God and placed his faith in Him. The other nine, by implication, were Jews who were ungrateful and symbolic of the Jewish nation who rejected Him.

When Jesus speaks of “faith,” it is a belief based on the fact that 1) He is the Messiah and 2) human beings recognize the truth about themselves.

Jesus recognized genuine faith when He observed people who understood the true nature of sin, recognized their unworthiness before God and sought His grace in forgiveness.

When Jesus speaks of your “faith,” it is in the context of its object and your attitude. Is Jesus your friend as a peer or as the King? And yet He is more concerned to ask for your faith than to demand it.

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