

2.4.2024 Sermon

Without Faith It's Impossible to Please God

Hebrews 11:6

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

faith, god, mustard seed, delights, plant, turn, seed, verse, reward, cain, grows, talked, mountain, face, moment, means, paymaster, pause, hebrews, potential

SPEAKERS

Rev. Dr. Tracy L. Saletta

Oh no, I forgot I wore flat shoes again. And whenever I do that, I always feel like I'm this tall behind the pulpit. You know, can we just pause and breathe that in again? I don't know why that's just hitting me so profoundly this morning is, God is on our side.

I think we have, I have, you know, I didn't come to know Christ until I was about 18-19 years old. Was brought up in a family filled with atheists and agnostics. And, you know, I just when I met God, just knowing the depths of God's love, for me is what changed my life. And then I entered church. And then all of a sudden, God became this law giver, do this, and I love you. Don't do this, and I will reject you. And I was like, hon, that's not who I really met. Let me pick my earrings.

You know, that wasn't the God that, you know, I met in my bedroom, and that changed my life. And, and I think, in some ways, we've been fed a bill of goods, because God is on our side, always, always on our side. God does not leave us, God does not forsake us. And as I'm going into the sermon today, you'll see how little, how little we need to respond to God. But we've been taught, we got to do all of these things. And we carry this giant burden of doing and having to be these perfect people. And, and God just requires something teeny, teeny, tiny of us, and it's called faith.

It's all God does is say, I invite you into something deeper. So, we've been studying faith. And we're in a series from Hebrews 11. And we're looking at our heroes of the faith. And what we're learning about this faith is that faith is the foundation of our relationship with the divine. And it's not really about right theology, or even right living. It's really about a living, active trust in the

unseen. It is a faith that resonates throughout the Bible. And it's this constant reminder that our connection is not based on what we see. But it's based on what we believe, or even better yet on who we believe in Hebrews 11, one where this thing starts, it says, "Now faith," and I believe that that means the present faith because faith can only be in the present. The faith that we had yesterday is gone. We don't have faith yet, in the future. The only faith we can have is the now faith right here, right now. Faith is always active in the present.

And it says, "Now, faith..." and this is the passion translation "brings our hope into reality, and becomes the foundation that's needed to acquire the things that we long for. It is all the evidence required to prove what is still unseen. Faith is all about the unseen. Faith is only faith. When it's activated, in the moment that you can't see something. The minute we see something, it's we no longer need faith." So faith is this ethereal thing and we're going to spend the next I don't know how many weeks teaching on it. And it's intangible.

You know, my family who still are atheist and or agnostics often say to me, Well, what if you're wrong? And I always say back to them, I don't know I could be. It's called faith. This is what our entire belief is built on is something that we don't see. So, when we've what we've learned so far in these past weeks is verse two. We learned that previous generations were commended for their faith. We learned in work verse three, that faith empowers us to see things differently. That's the verse on creation. And that verse four faith moves us to make beneficial choices. Able by faith offered God a better sacrifice. And that verse for faith still speaks today. It is still an active part of our life today. And verse five faith lifts us and removes us and brings us to a deeper level. That's Enoch.

So, I met verse six, and like everybody else. This has been some of the toughest sermons that I've planning and working and parsing out the sentences. Were all heavens, a time as the preachers, you know, bringing this forward. I have wrestled this whole week with this sermon, trying to go okay, what is it, Lord, that you want me to say? So, we're just going to dive in and see what happens.

So, the passion translation says this without faith living within us, it would be impossible to please God. And the reason for this is that we come to God and faith knowing that he's real, and that He rewards the faith of those who give all their passion and their strength and to seeking Him. The NIV says it like this. And without faith, it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him, you got to first believe that he exists, and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

So, I want to start with that word, please, that it's impossible to please. So that word please comes from two Greek words. The first one is our kale. And it means to make happy, satisfied or content. The second word it comes from is Aresko. And I'm saying all of those Greek words

with my Chicago accent, to give pleasure to hold on to your seats, to delight, and to give. And the Greek word that both of these come into is *urs Dale*. And that means to please in an especially positive way, to give the light to.

So, what this means that as we draw near to God, to seek God, to turn our faces to orient ourselves in any way to God, God is delighted. God is delighted when we turn our faces to them. And PS, by the way, I use them in response to the Trinity, to the parent to the child to the Holy Spirit. So, I use all of them together and say them. But can we pause there? Again? God is on our side. And God delights when we turn to God. Can we just drink that in? Even in this moment, turn your face to God. Just think of God. Just say a prayer. God is on the other side of that saying, Hi, I delight in you. I delight in your presence.

As much as we engage with God and love God. God turns God's own face towards us and delights back in us. That's so lovely to me. That's so lovely, that God delights. And you know, this theme of turning towards God, to connect with God is so prevalent in the book of Hebrews. And it's, it's lays this foundation in the book of Hebrews, Hebrews that you can draw near to me because of what Christ did. what Christ did Christ fulfilled everything for us? So that God delights over us whenever we turn our faces even if we just begin to turn goggles, come on, come on, and delights in us.

I like being delighted. Do you like being delighted in like when someone looks at you and delights in you and you can just see that they're smiling at you. And they think like, you're the best thing that's ever been on this earth in that suite. I love that. I love it when my friend or when my children or whoever, and they just look and you can see they're like, Yeah, you're okay. I like being with you. Right? Feels good. That's God. God looks at us. And he's like, Yeah, you're okay. I like you. I like being with you. Oh, I love that.

So alongside this in this verse, and it's so simple that I could almost say this and just go sit down. It's impossible to have relationship with God. Or be delighted by God, if you don't believe that God is. Is it saying, somebody say right behind me. Oh, you're a ventriloquist. It sounded like it came behind me. Wow, man. God did Yes, exactly. I am here, Lord. But, but really, unless you believe it's impossible, it's impossible to have any kind of connection, any kind of anything, if you don't believe that God is. And it's not that God doesn't believe in you, by the way. And it's not that God is going to reject you, by the way, because you don't believe God is just waiting for you, for us to turn our faces towards God. It's not that God turns God's own back on us.

This is what God was inviting Cain into. In the verses that Sandra so beautifully preached on is he looked at Cain and he said, "Why are you downcast" meaning? Why is your face turned away and down from me, turn towards me, turn away from that, what sin is whispering in your

ear, turn away from the lies that you have to do more than fix your eyes on Jesus, turn away from the lies that that you are not worthy. Turn away from the lies that you are not enough. Turn away from the lies that people have spoken over you your whole life and told you what you're not turn away from those lies, God is inviting us into and turn your face towards Me.

And, you know, I'm gonna give a PS here. So, pause my sermon go over here. Good to give you a little bit of my theology, I really believe in the depths of my soul, that before any atrocity is committed by anybody, before any sin is enacted, that God is whispering in our ear. And that God is saying, if you do what is right, will you not be accepted? If you will turn towards me. But if you don't do what's right, if you make the choice to keep your face turned away and down like Cain did, sin is crouching at your door. And it desires to have you. And this verbiage here you must rule over it is like you got what it takes to say, no. You got what it takes to fight this. Because you have everything you need for life and godliness within you. You have what it takes, turn your face towards Me and fix on me. He's saying you can master this.

What this doesn't mean is that God rejects us. Even as I said, even if we haven't oriented our faces towards Gods yet, even as we don't understand who God is, yet, God does not reject us. What this does mean is that God will seek and search for us and surface out for relationship of every moment of every day, that we are breathing on this earth.

So, we also heard in this passage with Cain and Abel, that even after Cain murdered his brother, God still comes to Him. And God still marks him so that nobody touches him. God still engages in relationship with Cain. Even after he committed this atrocious sin, God still came to him.

Faith is not about believing for something. Faith is about believing in someone. Faith is about opening our hearts to the one who is not seen. Faith and is about believing in the one who has not seen faith is that bridge that stands between the now and the not yet. And again, I'm gonna say it again, faith is active, when we can't see, when we see we no longer need it. But faith is its most powerful when we are believing in that middle space.

So, the faith that verse six talks about it involves two things. It involves first believing in the existence of God. And then it involves believing that God rewards those who earnestly seek Him. Here's the thing that I love about this. Is Barclay writes this, William Barclay, who wrote a commentary, he says, "We believe in God, we believe in God. "And there is a part where we also believe that God is interested in us as well. That God wants to reward us. And God is interested, it goes right along with me that you are on my side. It goes right along with God delights in us. And it goes right along with God is interested in us.

Have you ever been in a conversation with somebody and they're on their phone? Everybody in the room? Right? And do you even feel like you're heard? Do you feel like you're being listened to at all? Or you have somebody and you're talking? And you can tell a they're bored, be they don't agree? See, they're thinking of what they're going to say. While your lips are moving, you can see their head going, and they're going to reply to you. Or they're just like, basically falling asleep. Right? They're just and you're like, hello, right? God isn't like that. When we look and we go, God, he goes, yes. Yes, I'm here. I'm listening. God is interested in us.

Sometimes when I go out with my girlfriend, and we're talking and cheering, and she'll sometimes say to me, Wow, you're like one of the most interesting people right now that I've ever talked. And I'm like, yeah. Good. We're connecting. Right? That's how God is. We say, God, damn, God is there. God is there with us at all times. I love I live on this. I live on these moments. And I literally pause and go, you're interested in me? You, you're on my side. You're you delight in me?

Can we just close our eyes for one minute? And if you want to just put your hand on your heart, take a deep breath. I just want you to just quietly say to yourself, God, you delight in me. And drink that? Got God, you are interested in me? And God, you're on my side can open your eyes? Can you feel that? When you do that when you drink it when you take it in? You don't just listen to the words but you take them in and you drink them.

So that word reward which I absolutely was fascinated with. It is only found here. It is used one time. This word right here God rewards that one time. And it was usually only used in the Greco Roman world. And it was referring to industry and commerce. It was rarely used in literature. It was rarely used in poetry. It was rarely used in this kind of an instance. So, when I read something like that, I go why is that? This word literally means paymaster. It means Rewarder it means a person who makes payments and when return for services rendered. This is another delicious moment to me. Because what this means is that as we turn towards God, God has almost no choice. But to turn back to us and reward us. What that means is, you know, God is bound by God's own rules and laws. God, you know, people say God can do anything. No, God can't. Because God can't go beyond God's own law laws that he put them. God can't go beyond what he has laid in the foundation of what truth is. So, when the author is using this, these kinds of words, he's saying that God has to reward not only does God have to reward, but God is the reward.

So, God rewards with God's own self. So, it doesn't just mean like, Okay, you're gonna get something because you believe God, it means that God is encompasses the reward, and God cannot. Not I know double negative, cannot not respond. See, I like that. Because I know then that when I'm talking, and when I'm speaking to God, and when I'm praying, that because of

who God is, God must respond to me that my answers are not dependent on me, thank God, because I am a mess. But my answer to prayer, my answer is dependent on God. My whole walk and relationship with God are not dependent on me. What is dependent on me is that thing called faith. What is dependent on me is to turn my face towards God. That's my job. The rest, rest is up to God. My job, my job is to trust. My job is when I can't see what God is doing, that I can trust that God is doing. Because God has a paymaster. What that means is that God must respond to me, because that's what God says, not because of me.

I love this. Because I don't want it to depend on me because I'm flaky. Because one moment, I'm spiritual, and the next moment, I'm a mess. And then the next moment, I'm amazing. And the next moment, I'm screaming at my husband. Sometimes he's nodding, no, because I'm perfect. Right, honey?

So, it's so interesting. The church has been built for so long on I gotta be perfect. I gotta be good. I got to do it. Right. And then God will answer. What this is about? Is God saying no, I'm going to answer because I am the paymaster. I am the rewarder. You, your job is to look, your job is to find me. Now, does that mean we can do whatever we want? And no, because the closer we come to God, the more unlike cane, we lift our faces and turn towards God, the more we want to follow, and the more we want to do, and the more we want to make these healthy choices, because we know that there is something there that's much better than these bad choices that we make ourselves.

So, as I've been thinking about this, and I haven't been able to move beyond if you have faith, as small as a mustard seed. All we need in our faith is a teeny, tiny, little mustard seed. So, I'm going to pause here, and I'm going to ask Tony to hand out the Tony, look, the three men back there, Tony, Matt. Brandon, can you guys hand those out? Who has one day Oh, they go ahead, Brad. We're going to do a little activity together. I want everybody in this room to know that this week I stuffed these little mustard seeds into these bottles. Thank you, Dana. Thank you. I sat there in my office, do you know how hard it is to stick those little tiny things in those little tiny bottles? And then cork it? Wow. A lot of time.

So, this is what I want us to do. I want us to split off into groups of four or five. And I want us to look at this little mustard seed. Little Annette is a real mustard seed in there. And I want us to list five things that come up for you and I have those questions. Can you put the questions up? Kathy? What do you see? What does this tell you about faith and what comes out for you when you see this. And you can just put it in your notes on your phone or something like that. And then I'm going to list them here. But I want to say this because this is another little thing that you won't know, but I'll know because I studied it is what I didn't know is the mustard plant is one of the most common in the middle Near East. And it is often considered to be a weed

because it spread so widely and quickly with its tiny seeds. Think about that for a minute. It spreads quickly. And it goes far. This little mustard seed.

So, I want you to break up into groups of four. And if you are somebody who does not like breaking up into groups, because I know you're out there you just think of it hold that little thing by yourself if you want to and look at it and just list because I'm going to have us talk about it in a minute. So, I'm gonna give you I'm gonna give you like three minutes. Okay, five, and just break up first, go ahead break up and then I'll tell you what to do.

This is what I'm going to have us do. I'm going to have Sophia go from group to group and you each give one the most profound thing that somebody said all right, and I'm gonna write it down. Okay, you gotta go fast. All right, go.

Sophia Foutres: Fast. No, no extra ramblings or anything. They're all go you guys are gonna go first. Hugs later.

Congregant: So, you know, you don't ever hand me a microphone and asked me to go quick. So, I think the most profound thing that I just heard and I hope you guys are okay with this is that it has a dual look the first one it's round it looks strong and kind of it looks powerful and like it could do whatever it needs to do but then it's so minuscule that it's so easy for it to get lost.

Tracy Saletta: Okay, give me that in a sentence it's powerful and small and can get lost sure.

People are you guys a group?

It's okay. So, we looked at this scene, and we're saying wow, this thing is so small but put it in the ground and you have this leap of faith that something's going to come out of it.

Tracy Saletta: Go ahead so.

Kind of going off of what this gentleman said. You don't have to have a lot of it. It's so goes far.

Since.

Tracy Saletta: Everybody's writing really long sentences. I'm okay. Thank you. Thank you, Matt. Look at how my back is turned I know who said that.

We were just affirming some of what was said earlier that unlike other seeds that when you plant you can plant them with control and precision to plant this would probably feel more like just scattering something so like planting it requires faith in a release.

Well said thank you and the sword people. Spokesperson.

Ours was something small but just that almost nothing can become something so big Say that again almost nothing can become something so big.

We talked first we googled it to see what a master plant would look like. So, in the Middle East are huge but one of the things we thought of was hey let's plant it what's taken home and plan just to see what it does. So that was one of our thoughts about the mustard seed is what happens when you plant it we don't know let's find out.

Thank you thanks people oh we get a live group back here.

As a reminder the directions were to say what you need to say and no babbling on so here we go. Faith alone doesn't do anything.

Sophia Foutres: I don't know why I thought you said the Russians said and I was like the Russians get into this hold on I.

Tracy Saletta: Got I'm sorry I got it. What does that mean faith alone doesn't do anything?

Now you want me to babble so I assume is what was said within our group. So just this mustard seed by itself because that was the question What does what does it what does this tell you about faith? So, looking the person who said it looking into this says faith alone doesn't do anything. The mustard seed.

You have to plant it.

Tracy Saletta: Thank you.

It's just the seed in a jar.

Tracy Saletta: Thank you. Did my face say I didn't understand? Very high No. Okay, so just you got to plant that you got to move on it. Thank you that's profound. Thank you.

Sophia Foutres: The movie quote that was in my mind as I was that interaction was happening was are you understanding the words that are coming out of my mouth name that movie for 10 points or extra tithing?

So, I see potential. And I see potential and the reason for this is if you know what a mustard seed does, it gives us mustard obviously, and it is literally goes in almost everything we eat deviled eggs, egg salad, potato salad, cheese sandwiches, the whole deal. And this can be used as a metaphor for like how we as young Christians come up into like the ranks when we're fired up when we first get saved, and then you know, we kind of go neutral for a little while. And then we decide we want to, I don't know, continue with our walk and help other people and that's how I see like this, how this mustard seed grows from this tiny little thing into which is potential into something that is greater and grander for.

Everybody else really nice. Thanks, Joe with a bit of Yes, yes.

Kind of along with that potential, and also we google the picture of the mustard tree plant and that it can grow into this giant tree. So that also the potential is that there are millions of other seeds that can result from this one tiny seed if it is fostered and nurtured to grow and produce more seeds as it grows.

Okay, um,

I don't, we didn't get that philosophical, but we had a lot of good stuff. We talked about looking at this mustard seed and thinking about faith and trust, and thinking about the potential and the possibilities of space for growth, and the clarity and patience and movement. Nice. They're all here. Nice. Thank.

Sophia Foutres: I'm gonna go back here first and then I'll come get you speak in there.

The belief in the unseen it doesn't take a lot.

That's right. I won't drop it. We're saving, saving on costs.

On we looked at the mustard seed, and we saw hope, and that it was something little, but become could become mighty and strong something.

In our group we talked about God can do it, but will he do it? Kind of like the chicken and the egg which came first we kind of looked at it both ways. Will he do it? Or can he do it? So, we kind of flip back and forth.

Anybody here? We have a representative.

I did wonder what the seat would taste like. Okay. But also like if you'd need that much space to move a mountain, how much do we actually have without? Without our mountains wouldn't be for us at this point.

Tracy Saletta: Say that again.

If we need this mound of faith to move a mountain, how much faith do we actually have if our mountains aren't moving?

We don't have we don't even need as much do we have a representative here from the Okay, yeah. Okay, sorry, you guys, I'm just gonna choose for you.

I think we seem to circle a lot around house, the results of planting a seed are unpredictable.

We talked a lot about the seed and how big it grows and how far it grows. And one thing that keeps coming back to me in unfortunately, it's something that I said is, this reminds me of this little vial of gems that you put around your neck, you know, like the crystals and the little sparkly gems. And this is more valuable, this tiny little mustard seed is far more valuable than anything we spend big bucks for. And I would wear this around my neck.

Sophia Foutres: Somebody gives you a little hole punch of that cork, and you can put a thread through it.

Tracy Saletta: Yeah.

So, I'm going to share a little bit of a personal thing, but I promise I'll be really, really quick. So, I recently went through the process of IVF. And before they, you know, implanted the embryo, I saw it through a microscope. And that's what this reminded me of, it's so small, but I was so excited about it. And now it's growing, and it's becoming something magnificent. So, you see this little thing and it seems so insignificant and so you know you can miss it. But you know it has power, you know that there's something grand coming from it.

James Bady: Just wanted to add something to the responses that I hear from the teams. And most of us focused on the size of the seed versus its power. And what I mean by that is this none of you had doubt that it would produce known. You may have doubt on okay, how big does it need to be how small but not that it had the power to produce. And so sometimes when we tell this story about the mustard seed, and we focus on the size, not that I have enough to produce it, you all jump Have you had total confidence? You had total faith? In one thing?

Yeah. It will get it done. Take that with you, as you also think about what is the mustard seed in your life? And what is the mountain is trying to move? Have no doubt. It is enough.

Tracy Saletta: Yeah. Yeah. And I love what you just said, because that was going to be a point is in this parable or in this story, it's not a parable, we often fixate on the mountain. And in our lives, we often fixate on the mountain. And what I hear you saying is, there's no question about the seed is going to do something. And I think our journey is trusting in God and letting, letting that faith do what faith is supposed to do. And not look at the mountain. But look at God, trusting that our faith is planted and it's going to do what it's supposed to do. Right.

So, there's one more thing and then I'm going to close and that is Faith sent this to me this week. She had no idea she just sent it and it pardon? What oh that's so funny. Didn't even put it together. That's Faith the person, we're gonna have communion in a minute Natalia if that's what you're doing looking at me. You know, we go long when I preach okay? But she sent this to me and I loved this because it has to do with a mustard seed and I believe it's a hymn. And in a seed is an apple tree. In cocoons. There's a hidden promise in the bulbs. There's a flower and God alone sees it. Right God alone sees that out of this little mustard seed side, sighs faith, what is going to be produced? It's almost like our job is just simply to trust and trust that God being the paymaster, that God is that there is a reward. Our job is not to focus on the mountain or the reward. Our job is to focus in on God. Amen. Amen.