

FAITH THAT MOVES MOUNTAINS

Matthew 17:14-27

Key Verse: 17:20

“He replied, ‘Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, “Move from here to there” and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.’”

The last passage was Jesus’ glorious transfiguration on the mountain. The scene of Jesus shining like the sun, together with Moses and Elijah, and with Peter, James and John, was like a preview of heaven, where God reigns. We wanted to stay there forever, as Peter did. Today’s passage is set at the foot of the mountain. There, it seemed that Satan was ruling. It was occupied by unbelieving and perverse people and malicious demons. So there were many problems and terrible suffering. No one wants to live in such an atmosphere. But Jesus came down the mountain and entered that dark valley. Jesus, the Son of God, revealed his power and glory. Jesus restored God’s rule once again, advancing the kingdom of heaven. We cannot always live on the transfiguration mountain. In fact, we must spend most of our time in the valleys of this real world. But Jesus teaches us that faith in the Son of God can turn anyone into the kingdom of heaven. May Jesus help each of us to have faith that moves mountains through this study.

First, Jesus heals a demon-possessed boy (14-18).

As Jesus came down from the mountain, his features must have carried the afterglow of his transfiguration experience. His brilliant, awesome image as the Son of God had been burned into the hearts of his three top disciples, Peter, James and John. They too had been changed. They had been transported from the mundane world to see Jesus’ heavenly glory. Their minds and hearts were gazing upon things divine. However, when they arrived at the bottom of the mountain, a real world experience awaited them.

Look at verses 14-16. “When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. ‘Lord, have mercy on my son,’ he said. ‘He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him.’” This father was suffering terribly because his son was subject to seizures. One moment, the boy would be okay, but the next moment he changed into quite another person. He became self-destructive and unpredictable. His father dared not bring him to a summer barbecue, or he might throw himself into the fire and burn his body. Nor could his father take him to the beach, or he might throw himself into the water and drown. The father had to be constantly alert. He must have spent many sleepless nights babysitting his son. He wanted his son to study well, have many friends, and play baseball. He wished his son won a CBF Bible memorization contest, like Grace Yoshiba, Joshua Lomahan, and others yesterday. But his son was miserable and a burden to everyone. Still, the father loved him dearly. So he came to Jesus, humbly knelt down and asked Jesus’ mercy.

The father called the boy’s problem “seizures.” It sounds like a medical or psychological problem. However, in verse 18, Jesus deals with it as demon possession. These days many don’t like to admit the existence of demons. They prefer to interpret everything psychologically. It is a great mistake. Dr. M. Scott Peck was an accomplished psychiatrist, a Harvard graduate. Yet his conclusion, through years of practice, was that demons are real and the root cause of evil in some people. So he referred some of his patients to exorcists for treatment. You can read about it in his book, “Glimpses of the Devil: A Psychiatrist’s Personal Accounts of Possession, Exorcism, and Redemption.” Last Friday, Dr. Park Dietz, a forensic psychiatrist testified in the trial of Andrea Yates. Ms. Yates is the woman who killed her five children—Noah (7), John (5), Paul (3), Luke (2), and Mary (6 months)—by drowning them in a bathtub. According to Dr. Dietz, “She had obsessions about hurting her children for years, and at some point concluded that it must be Satan.” We cannot interpret human behavior solely in terms of psychology. Drugs cannot drive out Satan. We must admit that man is a soul and that demons exist. We must recognize the work of Satan for what it is.

In desperation, this father had brought his boy to Jesus. But Jesus was unavailable, being up on the mountain. So the man came to Jesus’ disciples for help. This refers to the nine disciples who did not go up the mountain with Jesus. Upon hearing the father’s request, they said, “Sure, we can drive it out.” The first time, they sent a couple of sub-intern disciples, saying, “Go and take care of this.” But the demon did not respond. The next time, they sent some junior staff disciples. The demon laughed at them. Finally the nine disciples got together for an all out assault. They

encircled the boy and said in unison, “Mr. evil spirit, we command you to come out.” This time the evil spirit said, “Is that right? Why should I come out? You rude disciples. I will teach you a lesson.” Suddenly the boy began to look like the Incredible Hulk. The disciples, in one accord, turned and ran away. In spite of their intense effort and profuse sweating, they had failed miserably. This failure was not a light matter. The suffering boy was getting worse. His father’s heart was broken. It was a disgrace to Jesus, and discouraged everyone.

When Jesus came down the mountain, the first thing he heard was this story. How did he respond? Look at verse 17. “‘O unbelieving and perverse generation,’ Jesus replied, ‘how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me.’” Jesus was deeply grieved over the entire generation. This included onlookers—who were like spectators at a sporting event, and the religious leaders—who were not only powerless, but critical as well. Yet Jesus was especially grieved over the unbelief of his disciples. They had been with Jesus for a long time. They had seen many great miracles. They had tasted the compassion of Jesus repeatedly. They should have won a glorious victory for the kingdom of God. But they had failed miserably. Jesus felt he had to start all over again with the ABC’s of discipleship. But there was little time, for he was marching to the cross. We must know that Jesus grieves over unbelief in his people. We must take the sin of unbelief seriously. But many times it slips in undetected. One young man invited his Bible student to the summer conference. The student said, “I would rather attend a rock concert.” A rock concert can lead him to hell. Jesus can give him eternal life. However, the young Bible teacher simply said, “Okay,” in agreement. Wicked unbelief had slipped into his heart.

Jesus called the generation “unbelieving and perverse.” Nobody wants to be called “perverse” or “you pervert.” But we must know that people who live in unbelief become perverse. Here, the word “perverse” comes from a Greek word that means rebellious without cause. People in Jesus’ generation were like that, and people in our time are like that. Sometimes Bible students respond well to the word of God. But after Bible study, they go home, watch television, surf the internet, and swim in the unbelieving generation. Then when we see them again, they are rebellious without reason. An unbelieving atmosphere makes people perverse and rebellious. Jesus laments over an unbelieving generation.

Though Jesus was grieved, he did not ignore the plea of the father or the peril of the boy. Jesus said, “Bring the boy here to me.” Though his disciples had failed, Jesus never fails. Then what did Jesus do? Look at verse 18. “Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment.” Jesus rebuked the evil spirit: “You, evil spirit, come out of this boy!” Jesus’ word was the very word of God Almighty. The demon trembled and left the boy at once. The boy was healed completely. This is not just an old, old story. It happens today. One young man was abandoned by his father at a young age. He began to hate his father. Later he began to doubt the love of God and he condemned himself. Then a demon began to channel into his heart through his dark thinking. The demon drove him to adulterous behavior. It was not him, but the demon living in him that made him evil. A devoted missionary brought him to Jesus in prayer. He began to repent of his sins. Then the Holy Spirit exposed the work of the demon in him and drove it out. Jesus has power to drive out demons. Jesus can heal all the tormented young people of our time. Let’s bring them to Jesus.

Second, faith that moves mountains (19-21).

When Jesus drove out the demon, God’s glory was revealed. God is Almighty God who has power to drive out demons. God is the God of compassion who saves those who trust in him. Jesus’ mighty work drove out unbelief and made an atmosphere of faith. The disciples could breathe a sigh of relief, “Whew! Jesus saved us again.” But something troubled them a lot. It was their failure to drive out the demon. Jesus had made it look so easy. But to them it seemed to be impossible. They were more puzzled when they considered their past experience. In Matthew 10:1, Jesus gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. According to Mark 6:13, they drove out demons and healed many sick people. But this time, they failed. They did not understand why. They asked Jesus, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?”

Look at verse 20a. “He replied, ‘Because you have so little faith.’” The power to drive out demons comes from faith. The disciples had little power because they had little faith. Maybe, while Jesus went up the mountain they grumbled about being left behind. They doubted Jesus’ love and good purpose for them. They became unthankful. They did not do Daily Bread or pray. Then they became part of the unbelieving generation. When the moment came to glorify God, they had no spiritual power to do so. Now they felt sorry about themselves wondering if they should resign as

Jesus' disciples. But Jesus still had great hope for them. Jesus patiently taught them how to have great spiritual power.

Look at verse 20b. "I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." Jesus gives his disciples and us a great promise. If we have faith the size of a mustard seed, we can have the power to move mountains. We do not need a great quantity of faith. But we need living faith. We need growing faith. This faith works in our minds and hearts and produces obedience to God and acts of faith. To have this kind of faith we must accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Then the Holy Spirit will dwell in us and enable us to pray. To maintain this kind of faith we must spend quiet time with God in prayer. Look at verse 21, which is in the footnote of our Bible. Jesus said, "But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." Jesus taught his disciples that prayer was the means by which they could exercise mountain-moving faith.

What is prayer? We cannot answer this question exhaustively in this short message. But simply speaking, prayer is communion with God. It is listening to God and speaking to God. This is not random conversation. Effective prayer requires that we follow Biblical principles. 1 John 5:14,15 tells us how we can have confidence that God hears and answers our prayer. It says, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him." We can be confident that God hears our prayer when we pray according to his will. In other words, when we pray about what God is interested in, God pays attention. But if we only pray for our selfish benefit, we may find that we are talking to ourselves. This happens in our conversations with each other as well. If we speak about what another person is interested in, they will engage us in conversation willingly and joyfully. But if we only talk about our own problems and concerns, we may end up talking to ourselves. When we come to God in prayer, we must connect with God by praying according to God's will. Jesus taught us to pray first, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:9,10). If the nine disciples had desired to glorify God and prayed for God to work through them, they would have succeeded in driving out the demon. Our prayer must be God-centered and kingdom-centered. God wants to restore his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. God wants to spread the gospel to all nations. When we believe this and pray, God empowers us to have mountain-moving faith.

It has now been three years since Missionary Paul Choi's family went to St. Louis to pioneer a new chapter. At first, they struggled just to adapt to the new environment; not much was happening in their campus ministry. But recently there was a fire in their house which forced them to live with another missionary family for a while. In the course of living together, they began to eat Daily Bread and pray together at 6:00 a.m. every morning. It was a mustard seed of faith. God began to work in their ministry. Now there are nine missionaries there. Visa problems and job problems are being solved by the help of God. Students from two campuses are coming to Bible study and Sunday worship service. God is moving the mountain of St. Louis campus pioneering through their faith that prays.

Third, to have faith in the Son of God (22-27).

Look at verses 22-23. "When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.' And the disciples were filled with grief." This is what Jesus really wanted his disciples to accept and believe. It is the gospel. Christ died for our sins. When we believe this we overcome the power of sin. God raised Jesus from the dead. When we believe this we can overcome the power of death. When we come to God in Jesus' name, heaven listens, earth moves, and nothing is impossible for us.

In verses 24-27 Jesus teaches Peter how to live by faith in the Son of God practically. When Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum the collectors of the two-drachma tax came to Peter and asked, "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?" They must have looked intimidating. They might have threatened to repossess Peter's old fishing boat if he did not pay. Then Peter said, "Yes, he does." When Peter came into the house, Jesus asked him, "From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own sons or from others?" "From others," Peter answered. "Then the sons are exempt," Jesus said. This meant that Jesus is exempt, because he is the Son of God and the temple is his Father's house. Still, Jesus decided to pay the tax. Why? So that he may not offend anyone. Jesus did not avoid civic duty by exercising his heavenly privilege. In this way Jesus taught us to live as good citizens in this world. But Jesus' way of paying the tax taught an even deeper lesson. Look at verse 27. "But so that we may not

offend them, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.” Jesus is the Son of God.

In this passage Jesus teaches us to have faith that moves mountains. Especially we must pray diligently. Then God Almighty can do great work through us. By faith we can bring 600 people to the summer Bible conference. By faith we can see the healing and salvation of many young people. Lord, help us to have faith the size of a mustard seed.