

## Faith Moves Mountains!

For: Voice of the Church

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Maybe you've heard the expression "Faith moves mountains." It comes from the occasion when a desperate father brought his epileptic, deaf and mute son to Christ's disciples for healing, but they were unable to heal him. Then Christ cast out the demon who caused all these problems for the boy. When his disciples asked Christ why they couldn't cast out the demon, Christ responded: "Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you" (Mt 17:20 ESV).

Does this mean that we can accomplish anything, as long as we believe that God will help us to achieve it? Succeed in business, even if we aren't good at business? Become a stellar student, even if we don't have innate academic abilities? Can we *literally* move mountains by the power of faith?

Let's first look briefly at the broader context of this passage. At the beginning of Matthew 17, we read about Christ being on a mountain with three of his disciples who saw something of Christ's glory as he was transfigured before them. Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Christ about the "exodus" Christ would accomplish at Jerusalem (Lk 9:31) by his death and resurrection. And God the Father even spoke from heaven: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him" (Mt 17:5). The Father was telling the disciples to listen to Christ when Christ spoke about the necessity of his suffering and death. Christ had come into the world as Mediator to save his people from their sins. The way of suffering would be the way to glory for Christ.

When Christ came down from the mountain, Christ came to a scene of confusion, arguing, and inability. The scribes were arguing with the disciples (Mk 9:14). The disciples had been unable to heal an epileptic, deaf, and mute boy. And the boy's father was desperate. What a scene! These people needed Christ so badly as Saviour to set them free from strife, sickness, and desperation! Christ used words of the Song of Moses from the end of Moses' life to describe the people when he called them a "faithless and twisted generation" (Mt 17:17; cf. Deut 32:5,20). By taking these words on his lips – words in which Moses quoted the LORD – Christ was manifesting himself as the divine Son of God come in the flesh to be the Saviour!

This makes us think of what happened in the days of Moses. Moses had gone up Mt. Sinai to speak with God as the Old Testament mediator of the covenant who mediated between God and his people, and to receive a copy of God's covenant law. But when Moses was on the mountain with God, the people of Israel made the golden calf and used it to worship God. Moses came down from the mountain to a chaotic scene.

The issue at the golden calf incident was *a lack of faith!* Moses was gone and the people became afraid (Ex 32:1). They did not believe that God was with them. They wanted to be assured of God's presence, and that's why they made the golden calf.

Christ said that the disciples had demonstrated "little faith" (Mt 17:20). This must be understood in light of the fact that Christ also called them "faithless" (Mt 17:17) and that Christ said "...if you have faith..." (Mt 17:20) you can move mountains. Having "little faith," therefore, means that at times we

don't have faith. I read somewhere once that faith can be pictured as a dotted line. Just as in a dotted line there are gaps, so there are gaps in our faith – at times, faith is absent. That is why Christ called his disciples “faithless” (Mt 17:17).

Then Christ said that if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you can move mountains! The mustard seed was the smallest known seed in those days. The point is that faith is about simply saying, “I believe the Bible!” It's such a small statement – like a grain of mustard seed – but it can move mountains!

So, does this mean that if we believe that Christ will help us, we can accomplish anything? No, it does not. Earlier, Christ had sent his disciples to cast out demons – implying thereby that they could do it! Christ had commanded and commissioned his disciples as follows: “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons” (Matthew 10:8). But because they didn't believe it, they couldn't do it. When Christ explained this to his disciples and then said that if they believed “...nothing will be impossible for you” (Mt 17:20), he meant nothing of what he had told them to do.

Without an eye for this context of the passage, we will set ourselves up for much disappointment. Christ's statement about faith moving mountains shouldn't be applied to situations about which God has not commanded us to do a particular thing. It isn't a blanket statement that if we strike out in faith we will succeed. The Bible even teaches us to evaluate a situation and count the cost before taking action. As Christ himself said at another occasion and within another context: “For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand. And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace” (Luke 14:28-32). The Bible doesn't teach a gospel of success, in the sense of: Just believe that God will help you to achieve it, and you will succeed.

So, we should be cautious. This statement “Faith moves mountains” can easily be abused. We should be careful before applying it to a particular undertaking. This takes spiritual wisdom and prayer for proper understanding in a particular situation.

There is no command in Scripture for a particular person to enter business, so there is no promise that a particular person will succeed. There is no command in Scripture for a particular person to pursue academic studies, so there is no promise that a particular person will succeed. Neither is there a command in Scripture to tell a mountain to move literally. Christ was only using this graphic example to make the point that faith can accomplish great things.

But where there is a clear command in Scripture to do something specifically and we strike out in faith, we may be assured of success, provided we continue in faith. For example, when the Bible tells us to abandon sinful practices in our lives and we strive to do that in faith, looking to Christ for strength, nothing will be impossible. Maybe we are dealing with an addiction which is consuming us, marital unfaithfulness which is threatening to undo our marriage, anger issues which cause us to lash out at people, or laziness which is impeding our productivity. All of these things – addictions, marital unfaithfulness, anger issues, and laziness – are things which God forbids in his Word. These are things which God commands us to fight against! Then we can say: Nothing will be impossible for me! Faith

changes lives! Faith moves mountains! That's because Jesus Christ came to change lives by his death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave! Christ came to redeem us from the slavery of sin and death, and to set us free so that we can serve God according to his Word.

So, we should not only be cautious when applying this passage, but we may also be confident when applying this passage. Faith moves mountains!

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