



# Independence Church Of Christ

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## LESSON FOR SUNDAY, JULY 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020

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### Can Faith Really Move Mountains?

*“You don’t have enough faith,” Jesus told them. “I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it would move. Nothing would be impossible.” (Matthew 17:20 - NLT)*

In order to correctly interpret a passage such as Matthew 17:20, we first look at the overall context of the passage. Jesus, along with Peter, James and John, had just come down from the “*mount of transfiguration*”, and they encounter a man with a demon-possessed child (possibly epilepsy, as well). The man tells Jesus that he brought his son to Jesus’ disciples, but they couldn’t cast the demon out (recall that Jesus earlier, in Matthew 10:1, gave His disciples the authority to cast out evil spirits). Jesus then chastises them for their lack of faith and then casts the demon out of the boy. When His disciples inquire as to why the demon did not obey their command, Jesus replies with the statement in Matthew 17:20. Their faith, He says, is small and weak. If it were the size of even the smallest of the seeds, the mustard bush seed, they would be able to “*move mountains*”.

The first thing we need know about our *faith moving mountains* phrase is that of the Bible’s use of literary techniques. The Bible is first and foremost God’s revealed Word; we want to be clear on this point (2nd Timothy 3:16 – “*All Scripture is inspired by God (God-breathed) and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.*”). While the Bible is God’s revealed Word, it is revealed to us by way of language. God condescended — He lowered Himself — to speak to us in ways in which we would understand. Consider a father trying to communicate with his young child about an adult subject. The father needs to *condescend* in order to be understood by the limited intellect and understanding of the child. This is analogous (though not identical) to the way in which God speaks to us.

The Bible employs many forms, or genres, of literature. There is historical narrative, poetry, prophecy, apocalyptic writing, and epistolary literature (to name a few). Among these various literary genres, several literary techniques are used — metaphor, simile, imagery, parable, allusion, irony, personification, paradox, and hyperbole. As readers of the Bible, we must recognize when these techniques are being used so we

can properly interpret the meaning. For example, in John 10:7, Jesus says, “*I am the door of the sheep*”. How are we to interpret this verse? If we are too literal, we might start looking for a doorknob hidden somewhere on Jesus’ body. However, if we understand this to be a metaphor, then we can begin to understand His meaning (*Jesus is the way of access to eternal life*, much like a door is the way of access into a room).

Another thing to consider in biblical interpretation is the context of the passage. More often than not, when we take a single verse out of its native context, we end up misinterpreting the verse. In the context of Matthew 17, Jesus rebukes the disciples for their weak faith and says that even if they had mustard seed-sized faith, they could command the mountain to move. Contextually, the mountain must refer to the demon that was afflicting the man’s son. Jesus tells His disciples that, if their faith was stronger, they could have commanded the demon to leave the boy, and it would be so. This was clearly the case in Matthew 10 when Jesus sent them out to cure diseases, cast out demons, and spread the gospel. Therefore, it is clear from the context that Jesus does not intend to assert that mustard seed-sized faith can literally move mountains. Rather, the expression Jesus uses was a common colloquialism of that day; to a Jew of Jesus’ day, a mountain was a metaphor signifying a seemingly impossible task.

*Faith that can move mountains* is not meant to imply a faith that can literally move literal mountains. The point Jesus was making is that even a little bit of faith — faith the size of a tiny mustard seed — can overcome the many mountainous obstacles we have in our lives.

*I tell you the truth, you can say to this mountain, ‘May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and it will happen. But you must really believe it will happen and have no doubt in your heart. (Mark 11:23 – NLT)*

Mountains come to us in diverse forms, such as obstacles, opposition, sickness, death, difficulty, impossibility, and insurmountable situations. These are mountains that are figurative mountains, as expressed above. Faith removes them from our way. Faith makes them plain and they become as nothing before us. For nothing can stand in the way of a man or woman of faith.

Jesus went further in verse 24 of Mark 11 telling His disciples of the importance of believing while making a request in prayer (“*I tell you, you can pray for anything, and if you believe that you’ve received it, it will be yours.*”), and Hebrews 11 tells of how men and women of old used faith to move obstacles seen and unseen.

## **How, Then Does Our Faith Move Mountains?**

Having identified your mountain(s) (mountains in the form of difficulty, failure, and sickness, etc.), you can be victorious over them *by faith in the power and relationship of Christ*. Anything you can think of that serves as an obstacle to enjoying the best life God has for you, you exercise your faith in removing them.

Using Matthew 17:14-21 as our case study, the disciples could not cast out the demon, and then Jesus pointed out some factors that hindered them:

- Unbelief / Lack of Faith
- Prayers
- Fasting

- \*And I add, to be deeply rooted in the Word (Truth)

Having these, we can move any form of the mountains in our lives, though some require additional *prayer and fasting* (“*However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.*” - Matthew 17:21 – NKJV) because most times, as recorded in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 10:4, the weapons we fight with (and against) are not the weapons of this world. Spiritual weapons have divine power to demolish strongholds.

Most of the time our unbelief restricts the spiritual power of God in our lives. It is because of our unbelief (lack of faith) that we fail to remove spiritual obstacles so often in our lives. If we had but a grain of true faith, though little as mustard seeds, we could speak and obstacles to spiritual growth and purity would be removed.

Note, an active faith can remove mountains, not of itself, but in the form of a divine power engaged by a divine promise (the Word of God), both of which faith depends upon.

Jesus, in all His teachings, always taught His disciples the importance of faith and why they needed to be *in faith* in all that they did. Any time His disciples fell short of this, He would ask, “*Where is your faith? You faithless generated on?*” (Luke 8:25; Mark 9:19; Mark 4:40; Matthew 14:31).

But to anyone who shows their faith, Jesus commends, like the woman with the issue of blood (Matthew 15:28) or the Centurion (Luke 7:1-10), and many others. This shows that when we apply our faith to our difficulties, God is always pleased as this shows we trust in Him to make all impossibilities possible.

## **What Does This Mean?**

Fear, doubt, unbelief, and prayerlessness hinder the working wonders of faith in our lives. Whenever we show the above, we are saying, “*God, this situation is bigger than You; You just cannot solve this*”, forgetting that He is the God of all possibilities.

Trusting in God is leaving all to Him in faith and knowing that everything will work out according to His Will for you. But that does not mean we should not do our own part, for *faith without works is dead*.

