



THE POWER OF FAITH

“14 And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying, 15 Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. 16 And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. 17 Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me. 18 And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. 19 Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? 20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. 21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.”

- Matthew 17:14-21

The Power of Faith

I want us to take our Bibles now and look at Matthew chapter 17. Matthew chapter 17 And I want us to look at a lesson taught by the Lord Jesus Christ on the power of faith. In this text, I want you to look at verse 14, and I want to read, as a setting for our message tonight, verses 14 through 21.

“And when they were come to the multitude, there came to Him a certain man, kneeling down to Him and saying, ‘Lord have mercy on my son, for he is epileptic and greatly vexed, for often he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. And I brought him to Thy disciples, and they couldn’t cure him.

“Then Jesus answered and said, ‘O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me.’ And Jesus rebuked the demon, and he departed out of him, and the child was cured from that very hour.

“Then came the disciples to Jesus privately and said, ‘Why could not we cast him out?’

“And Jesus said unto them, ‘Because of your unbelief. For verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, ‘Move from here to yonder place,’ and it shall move. And nothing shall be impossible unto you.’ And then the authorized version adds, “Howbeit this kind goeth not out except by prayer and fasting.”

Now, this is an exceedingly interesting passage, and I think before you’re done, you’ll see the clarity of the Lord’s message in it to His disciples and to us. Faith can move mountains.

That’s the essence of it in verse 20. “If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say unto this mountain, ‘Move from here to yonder place,’ and it shall move, and nothing shall be impossible unto you.”

Now, faith moves mountains. Faith accomplishes great things. That’s obvious. I think we’ve heard that many, many times. But I wonder if we really understand what it means. Let me give you just a little background. It was faith in God’s power that caused Caleb, the Jewish

spy, to look at the land of Canaan, with its giants, and say this in Numbers 13:30, “Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it.” That was faith in God’s power.

It was faith in God’s care that enabled Job to say, in the midst of personal disaster, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him,” Job 13:15. It was faith in God’s protection that enabled Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to stand on the edge of the fiery furnace and say, “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace. And He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king,” in Daniel 3:17.

It was also faith in God’s Word that enabled Daniel to survive the lion’s den, as it says in the sixth chapter. So, Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him because he believed in his God.

It was faith that saved the sinful woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head, as it tells us in Luke chapter 7, verse 50.

And as you look at the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, that great chapter of faith, the Bible tells us it was faith that enabled Abel to offer a better sacrifice. It was faith that caused Enoch to be translated to heaven without death. It was faith that allowed Noah to build a great ark and preach righteousness. It was faith that caused Abraham to follow the call of God. It was faith that caused Sarah to have a child. It was faith that caused Isaac to bless his sons, that caused Jacob to bless his sons, that caused Joseph to hope in the future.

It was faith that called Moses to reject the pleasures of sin for the reproach of Christ. It was faith that caused Rahab to receive the spies. And it was faith that came, in the time of crisis to Gideon, and Barak, and Samson, Jephthah, and David, and Samuel and the prophets, and many, many others. The power of faith.

And the writer of Hebrews leads into the great opening of the twelfth chapter and says, “Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses” – and to what are they witnessing? To a life of what? – of faith – “as we stand surrounded by so many who say that we are to live by faith, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so

easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”

And so, you have throughout holy Scripture the testimony to the life of faith, to the power of faith. Now, in our text – and we can look at our text more closely now – Jesus makes one of the great statements in all of the Bible relative to faith when He says that faith moves mountains, and that it makes nothing impossible.

The point of the whole passage, in many ways, is a summary of the whole testimony of the people of God through all of history: that God moves powerfully when we believe. The power of faith.

Now, let me set you in the context of Matthew. We start in chapter 17 and verse 14, really kind of a special section, because here the Lord begins an instructional period with His disciples. And running through the end of chapter 20 – that is chapter 17, 18, 19, and 20 – we find the Lord’s special instruction to the Twelve. He is giving them sort of their final preparation for the ministry that lays ahead of them.

He has given them a revelation of His person as King. He’s given them a revelation of His program for the kingdom, and now He gives them a revelation of the principles for living in that kingdom. And there are so many lessons, and each is rich, and essential, and practical. And they will be great lessons not only for them but for us.

For example, He teaches them, in chapter 17, about faith. And then He teaches them about citizenship, how to live in this world. And then in chapter 18, He teaches them about humility. And then He teaches them about offending. And then He teaches them about discipline. And then He teaches them about forgiveness.

And then, as He comes into chapter 19, He teaches them about marriage, and about divorce, and about children, and about wealth, and about rewards. And then into chapter 20, about position and compassion. All of these are profound lessons for living the kingdom principles. And by the way, stuck in between those lessons periodically is a word about His coming death so that He continues to remind them that He’s moving to the cross.

This, then, is lesson number one in this series of lessons. And it is a lesson on the power of faith. And I believe it could change your life and mine if we learn it well.

Now, the whole scene takes place as the disciples Peter, James, and John, with the Lord Jesus, are coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration. They have just seen the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ. They have just seen what Paul calls the glory that is in Christ in the face of Christ, and they've seen it in its fullness – at least fuller than they've ever dreamed it could be seen.

And as they descend from the Mount of Transfiguration, having just had that marvelous and comprehensible experience of seeing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, they are met by a large crowd. And in verse 14 we read, “And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man” – we'll stop there.

Here is the setting for the story. They come down the mountain. They meet a crowd. The other Gospel writers tell us more about this crowd. Mark tells us it included scribes, Jewish legal experts – just the normal, run-of-the-mill gang of people that populated the northern Galilee area – and also the nine other disciples who weren't there at the Mount of Transfiguration. So, you have the disciples, the scribes, and the multitude of people, and they're there to wait and to meet Jesus and the three who come down from the mountain.

Now, this sets up the scene. And in almost every one of these teaching incidents that run through chapter 20, the Lord uses a living situation as the illustration for the principle He wants to communicate. He was the master of taking life situations and from them teaching and burying indelibly in the mind's spiritual truth. So, it is not just spiritual truth given verbally, but coming out of a living, dramatic illustration.

Now, as we look at the narrative, I want you to follow four key elements in this narrative text. First is the pleading of the father. The pleading of the father.

Now, the center of attraction obviously, in this crowd, as the text tells us, is a man. A certain man, it says in verse 14. And it says about him, “He was kneeling down to Him” – that is to Jesus Christ – “and saying.” Now, here is a man in a posture of reverence. Here is a man in a posture of humility. You see him worshipping, kneeling. And then you add the title of verse

15. He says to Him, “Lord.” And you could see that he really held Jesus in high esteem. Just what he fully meant by the title “Lord” we can’t really know, but it certainly was the deepest respect for Jesus Christ, whose reputation as a healer and as one sent from God, a miracle worker and a teacher without equal had run its course throughout all of Galilee, and surely the man knew all about Jesus.

So, though we may not know the full quality of his reverence and the usage of the title “Lord,” we know the man believed that Jesus could heal. He believed He had divine power. And so, he has a request in verse 15, “Have mercy on my son.” A simple request. It’s an aorist imperative in the Greek. And he begs for an act of mercy. He begs for instantaneous healing. He wants Jesus to heal his son.

By the way, the word “mercy” – *eleeō* – basically means to show or demonstrate compassion. “Show compassion on my son.” The father is in deep agony. He is pleading for his son. And the further you read in the story, and when you add the narrative of Matthew – of Mark that parallels it in the narrative of Luke, that parallels it, it becomes obvious why the Father was so wrought in His heart with the matter of his son.

Look at verse 15 again. It says he is epileptic. Now, that’s a very interesting word, and in the Greek language, it basically means to be moonstruck. To be moonstruck. Because they believed, in that period of time, that certain strange behavior was caused by the moon. And we’re not too far from that, by the way. We have a word that we use rather frequently for people who act strangely. We call them lunatic. That also means moonstruck, or related to the moon, so that the term “moonstruck” simply demonstrates a rather pagan approach to defining this kind of behavior as something related to the moon like the tides perhaps.

The term is used only in one other place, and that’s in Matthew 4:24. But it is used to describe behavior that includes epilepsy, which is nervous disorder; convulsions; seizure. And in ancient times, people believed this was caused by some movement of the moon. Now, this is not a very pathological use of the term, but nonetheless, we understand they’re talking about a person acting crazily and out of control

Further, it says, “He is greatly vexed” – and that’s Old English for saying, “He is tremendously afflicted.” It is not a mild case of epilepsy, it is a major case; it is perhaps grand mal at its most serious level.

Now, Mark adds, at this point, most interestingly, in Mark 9:17, that the man was also dumb; that is, he couldn’t speak – or rather the child couldn’t speak. And Mark also adds, in chapter 9, verse 25, that he couldn’t hear either. He was deaf and dumb. So, he was epileptic at a severe level; he was deaf and dumb.

And then we go back to Matthew, and we pick this up, “He falls into the fire often, and often into the water.” Now, when he would go into one of these fits and one of these seizures of massive proportions, he would be exposed to great danger because all around that part of the world, of course, there were open fires. And as he would thrash about, he would have the obvious potential of falling into either a pool of water, of which there were many around the cities, for the drawing of water, or falling into a fire. And so, he was always in danger of being severely burned, and no doubt had been severely burned, and always in danger of being drowned.

Perhaps there was, in that demon that possessed this young boy, a violent desire for murder. So, you have a child with epilepsy, seizures, deaf and dumb, compounded by burning and near drownings. And this is his life.

Mark and Luke add other symptoms. Mark says that there was a demon in him, and the demon in him, he says, “Taketh him and teareth him.” Literally thrashes him. You could translate tear to strike, to dash, or to smash down. And so, in the fit that would go on, the demon would smash him to the ground and thrash his body. Luke says the demon threw him down or slammed him down. Mark says that he foams at the mouth; he convulses; he wallows and rolls in the dirt; and he withers away. You can imagine, can’t you? It was so severe that he couldn’t eat, that his body was dissipating rapidly.

And then, to make it worse, if it could be, Mark adds that the demon in him was a foul, unclean demon, which may mean that he uttered profanities, that he acted in a licentious, lewd, immoral way out of control.

And in Mark 9:21, the question is asked to the father, “When did he get like this?”

And the father says, “He was like this since he was a child.” Now you understand why the father’s pleading. He’s got a real heartache on his hands; something that would be very, very difficult for a father to bear. And this is his only son. What a picture. Here is the only beloved son of his father, and he’s about to face the only beloved Son of God. Jesus can identify with him. Jesus can understand the heart of this father.

And so, the father comes, and he pleads. And I can’t help but think, at this moment, that there is such a stark contrast - isn’t there? – between the mount of splendor and the valley of despair? I mean all the glory up there; and the unveiled Christ; and Moses and Elijah; and the transparent, beautiful light, the glow of the Shekinah coming from Christ; the conversation of Moses and Elijah; the glory of that second coming preview. And now, just a few hours after that, they descend into the reality of the sin-cursed world at its worst.

You say, “How do people get demons in them like this?”

Let me tell you something, if you’re not a Christian, you don’t have to do anything to get like this, because you’re ruled by the prince of the power of the air who can dispatch or permit or allow or not prevent his demons to do anything to you that they want to do. You have no way to resist that. And it’s not to say that this child was evil; this child was possessed from his childhood, from his young childhood. It was the choice of the demon, perhaps not even the choice of the child in terms of any moral choice.

And so, we are reminded again that we come from the mountaintop of the second coming right back down to reality. Let’s face it; we’ve had a few great weeks on the mountaintop, haven’t we? And we’ve been singing and praising God for the second coming as we’ve been anticipating it. But before it comes, we’ve got to get back to reality. And here’s reality. Here’s a pleading father with a son that is, humanly speaking, an utter disaster. Has no resources.

Keble has written, “If ever on the mount with Thee/I seem to soar in vision bright/With thoughts of coming agony/Stay Thou the too presumptuous flight/Gently along the vale of

tears/Lead me from Hermon's sunbright steep/Let me not grudge a few short years/With
Thee toward heaven to work and weep."

Don't let me get so caught up in the second coming and so caught up in the glory that is to come that I forget the pain that must be dealt with here. That leads us to a second point in the narrative. The pleading of the father brings us to the powerlessness of the followers.

Verse 16, "I brought him to Thy disciples, and they could not heal him." Therapeuō same word used throughout the New Testament for healing. "I brought him to the disciples, and they couldn't do it." Does that seem strange to you? Well, let me show you something. Go back to chapter 10, verse 1, when Jesus called His disciples, "He called unto Him the Twelve" – verse 1 says, Matthew 10 – "He gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all types of sickness and all types of disease."

Look at verse 7, "As you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons.'" Hey, they had been given the commission to do this. They had been given the power to do this, and now they can't do it. And what is even more amazing is they'd already been doing it. That's right. This isn't the first time that they had tried to cast demons out.

In Mark chapter 6, it tells us that He sent the Twelve forth to preach and to heal. And it says in verse 13, "They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them." They had done it before. They knew Jesus gave them the power, and they knew they had accomplished it in times past. And now, all of a sudden, they can't do it. What's gone wrong? Have they lost this power?

Luke adds, by the way, that the father pled with them, the nine who were down below. They pled with them to do this, and they couldn't do it. Now listen, did Jesus give – did Jesus promise them they could do it? Did He? Yes, chapter 10. Did He prove to them they could do it by allowing them to do it? Yes. So, they had the promise, and they had the power. What was missing?

Well, it's very simple; they didn't appropriate the power. Not too hard to figure out, is it? They didn't appropriate it. It was available, but they didn't appropriate it. They couldn't do, in chapter 17, what they were promised to do in chapter 10.

Now, let's leave that for a moment, and we'll come back to that. So, the father presses past them to Jesus. And we can't help but be moved by the sense of urgency of this father. He doesn't now have a lot of faith in the disciples of Jesus, but he still has some faith in Jesus. I think it kind of reminds me of how some people think about the Church. They don't have a whole lot of faith in the agents of Jesus, but they sure would like to get past the agents to Him.

In fact, I remember reading, in *The New West* magazine, an article by a man who was cynical about Christianity. And he said, at the close of his article, "Frankly, I think Jesus had a lot more class than most of His agents." And so, in a sense, they're not unlike – the father, rather, is not unlike the world in seeing the impotence of the Church and wanting to press often past that to get to the Savior Himself.

So, we see the pleading of the father, and the powerlessness of the followers. That leads us to what we'll call the perversion of the faithless in verse 17. It's time for Jesus to give a lesson, folks. I mean the disciples are in confusion. The father's in a state of tremendous grief. And now it's time for Jesus to speak. "Then Jesus answered and said, 'O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?'" Stop right there.

You don't get very many glimpses into the heart of Jesus like that one. You know what we'd call that in our language? That's being totally – what? – frustrated. "How long will I be with you? How long is this going to last, when I'm so used to working through angels? How long will I bear with you?" You're really seeing into the heart of Christ the pain of His heart, the disappointment that comes out of His lips.

You say, "Well, who does He have in mind, 'O faithless and perverse generation'?"

Well, I think – I think that's a general statement. The whole generation was faithless and perverse, but he generalizes off of the specific. And who were the specific ones who weren't exercising faith? The disciples. It was the particular inability of the disciples from which He

generalizes to the whole inability of the generation in which they lived. Because the scribe standing there, they didn't believe it either. And the other nine disciples couldn't pull it off. And the father himself was weak in faith. Do you remember he says, according to Mark's Gospel, when in conversation with Jesus in this same incident, he said, "Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief"? He believed a little bit, but not much more than a little bit.

And so, the Lord is saying, "O you disciples are symbolic of a whole generation of faithless people. And if you don't trust God, and you don't believe in God, you get twisted. And that's what perverse means, to be crooked or to be twisted. It's used of objects made by a craftsman that turn out lousy because he's a clumsy craftsman. Twisted, distorted, out of shape.

And He says, "You people who don't believe are distorted and twisted." And that's the generation He faced. No wonder there was a sense of frustration. I love that statement in verse 17, "How long shall I be with you?" You can see Him starting to get anxious to go back to the Father, can't you? He sorts of senses the end. "How long do I have to endure this?"

You see, His contemporaries were disastrous failures, and even His own disciples were continually having to learn the same lessons over and over and over and over. I mean just look at the crowd. The crowd is thrill seeking. They don't really believe fully. The scribes, they're gloating. Oh, you can know it. They're gloating over the inability of the nine disciples to heal this young boy. I mean they're really happy they can't do it. And the father is struggling with faith. And the disciples had failed to exercise the faith they need to heal the young boy, even though they had the promise and the power.

So, to some degree, the whole bunch of them were faithless and twisted and diverted from trust in God. And Jesus says, "Thirty-three years is about all of this I can take." And so, in the end of verse 17, He says, "Bring him here to Me. Bring him here."

At this point, Matthew doesn't tell us what happened, but Mark does. The father brought the boy. And as he brought the boy, Mark says, "The demon in the boy saw Jesus. And when he saw Jesus, he threw the boy into convulsions. The boy smashed into the dirt and began to roll in the dirt, wallow in the dirt, and foam at the mouth. And to be deaf and dumb, in addition to that, and all the horror of that scene.

Well, you know, the demon knew where he was. Demons know Christ. Remember Acts chapter 19, verse 15, when the demon said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?” They know Jesus. And this one knew Him. Just like the demons in the maniac of Gadara knew Him, he knew Him. And he knew he was at his Waterloo, too. When he saw Jesus, this demon – fallen angel of the satanic host – who had what the New Testament called demonized, daimonizomenos - who had demonized this child, when he saw Jesus, threw him into convulsions.

Now verse 18, “And Jesus rebuked the demon, and he departed out of him. And the child was cured from that very hour.” What a marvelous scene, isn’t it? I mean it all – it’s been going on for years, and it just ended [snaps fingers] that fast. Jesus rebuked the demon; he left. The child was cured from that very hour. He could speak; he could hear; he could think. No more convulsions; no more seizures; no more wallowing; no more foaming at the mouth; no more foul, evil, vile, wretched vocabulary if there was anything to come gutturally out of his dumbness. Amazing. Miraculous.

But Jesus always had that power. Always. It was just part of His ministry to cast out demons. He did it over and over and over again. And we’ve been following through Matthew, and we’ve seen it in chapter 4, we’ve seen it in chapter 8 twice. We’ve seen it in chapter 9. We’ve seen it in chapter 12. We see it here. Jesus had power over wretched, fallen angels.

By the way, Luke adds a wonderful little footnote here. Luke says, “And all were astonished” – I love this phrase – “All were astonished at the majesty of God.” A beautiful phrase. “All were astonished at the majesty of God.” Do you know why Luke uses that phrase? It lingers in his mind from the transfiguration. On the mountain, the majesty of God was seen in Christ, and no less was it seen in His power over the demonic world. Majesty. And Luke uses that word, the “majesty” of God. And it, by the way, is the very same word that Peter uses in 2 Peter 1:16 when it says, “We were eyewitnesses of His majesty on the holy mount.” This, too, revealed His majestic glory.

So, in response to the pleading of the father, and the powerlessness of the followers, the Lord confronts the perversion of the faithless generation, and He heals the child Himself.

Now, that brings us to the main point. This is the fourth point, the power of faith. It's now teaching time, folks. And we're going to find out what all this is meant to teach. I mean if we just stop here and go home, we really wouldn't know.

We say, "It's a nice story, glad for that child. It's wonderful. Nice to have that child whole for the father's sake. Nice for people to see the power of Christ, but it has nothing to do with me."

Oh, but it does. It does, and let's see why. The whole incident is merely an illustration of a lesson. And here comes the lesson in verse 19, "Then came the disciples to Jesus privately. And they said, 'Why could not we cast him out?'"

"I mean you just came up and [snaps fingers] he was gone. Why couldn't we do it? It doesn't square with what you told us in chapter 10. I mean it doesn't make sense."

Mark says they went into a home, maybe a home where they were staying in that area. And they got him alone, and they said, "Why couldn't we do it?" They didn't ask, "How did You do that?" They knew how He did it. They wanted to know why they couldn't.

So, Jesus teaches them a great lesson. Verse 20, "Because of your little faith." That's the original text. Not "unbelief," not "no faith." "Because of your little faith. You had weak faith. You didn't believe enough."

Now, at this point, I know I run the risk of sounding like the average faith healer. So, let me clarify this, because most of us run so fast the opposite way that we've eliminated faith from our lives altogether, and everything for us is just matter of fact. You know? But He says, "Because of your little faith."

You know, if they had one problem, what was it? Little faith. Have you heard that before? "O ye of" – what? – "little faith." Remember I told you that was the subtitle for the disciples? The O Ye of Little Faith Association. They always were indicted for that. Four times Jesus says to them, "O ye of little faith."

Now, what's He saying? And it's not enough for me to say that; I've got to get a handle on that, and I think you do, too. I want to know exactly what that means. Now, follow my thinking very closely. What is our Lord saying, "O ye of little faith"? Does He mean, "Well, you don't believe down deep, in some subjective way"? What is He really saying?

Well, let me give it to you as simply as I can. When the disciples first saw this child, the father brought him. And there's little doubt in my mind that they attempted to heal the boy. And maybe they said, "In the name of Jesus Christ be gone." He didn't go. Nothing happened. And maybe they said it one more time, "In the name of Jesus Christ be gone," and he didn't go. And so, they said, "Well, it's too difficult for the Lord. It just – it can't be done; it can't be done." So, they gave up. I mean they just bailed out. Their faith ran out at that point, and they quit.

And in case you think that's unusual, let's take a little trip. Go back to Matthew chapter 6. This was pretty routine behavior for them. He teaches them a rather important lesson. We believe the Sermon on the Mount was spoken to the multitudes, but also to His disciples, as is indicated in chapter 5. And when He speaks to them, and particularly in verse 30, "Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field which today is and tomorrow is cast in the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

Now, one thing they worried about was the matter of clothing and food and drink. Now, they were okay with what they had; it was what they didn't have that worried them. They had a lack of faith in God to supply what they didn't see immediate in their hand.

I mean all of us can believe; we say, "Oh, yes, my God supplies all my need; all you've got to do is go to the closet and take it out." Or, "The Lord provides all our food; all you have to do is go to the cupboard in your kitchen or go to the market and buy it." So, you don't have any trouble believing God for what you have in hand, for what is accessible and available to you. And that's the way they were.

But as soon as they were hearing from Jesus, "Follow Me," and, "Come after Me," and, "I want you to know there's going to be no place to lay your head," and all of this and all of that, and the Lord says, "Now, don't worry about it. My God is going to take care of

everything, and God who clothes the grass is going to clothe you; and God who feeds the birds is going to take care of your food,” and all of these kinds of things.

They had a very difficult time handling what they didn't have but knew they needed. They didn't have any resources. They didn't have any jobs. How were they going to get fed? Where were they going to sleep? And their faith ran out at the point they couldn't see the provision.

Now go to chapter 8 and verse 26. And now they're on a sea, the Sea of Galilee, in a boat, and there's a tremendous storm. And Jesus is asleep. And they shake Him and wake Him. They say, “Lord, save us; we perish; we're going to drown.”

And He said unto them, “Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith.” There's that same speech again. You see, they could believe the Lord would take care of them and protect them as long as there were no waves. But as soon as the storm came, their faith quit. It only went so far until they couldn't see any human way out, and that's where their faith ended.

And, you know, we fall into that category. We can believe God, “Oh, yes, I trust the Lord; I believe the Lord.” And then we hit the storm, and we cannot see any way out, and our faith comes to a halt, and we enter into despair. You see, when faith stops, despair begins. When faith stops, worry begins. When faith stops, doubt begins.

Look at Matthew chapter 14, verse 31. And we're going to pull this altogether, and you'll see it. Here's Peter. He's out of the boat; he's walking on the water. Now, his faith got him out of the boat, but as soon as he saw what was going on – in verse 30 he saw the wind; he was afraid; he began to sink. He cried saying, “Lord save me.”

“And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, caught him” – and here comes that same speech again – “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” And we see it again. He could believe God until he saw the wind, until he saw the storm. And when He knew there was no human way to conquer that problem, he ran out of faith. It really wasn't faith at all, was it? Because faith is the ability to believe God when there are no human resources.

Look at chapter 16 for the fourth time that He gives this same speech. And now the disciples don't have anything to eat, and they're concerned about that. In verse 8, He says, "O ye of little faith," again. They needed food for themselves, for another crowd that had gathered. They didn't have the faith to believe the Lord could supply it.

Now listen, let me sum all four of these up. And you get this, you get the whole lesson here. All these incidents tell us what little faith is. Little faith is the kind of faith that believes in God when you have something in your hand. Got it? "Oh, yes, I believe God. Oh, yes, the Lord provides; here it is, and I'm hanging onto it." That's little faith. But little faith can't believe God when it doesn't have in hand its resource. That's little faith.

Great faith says, "I believe God without anything in my hand. I believe God in the middle of the storm. I believe God though the wind is howling. I believe God though there's nothing on the cupboard. I believe God though I don't have any clothing. I believe God." That's great faith.

Little faith, most of us are really good at little faith. We believe God because we can see what He's done; it's right here.

Now, in all these four incidents of little faith, the Lord was present. Right? In each time He took care of it, provided for them, gave them what they needed, met their need, took them at the point of their little faith and did what they couldn't do. But this time, He was away. And they couldn't do it, and He wasn't there. And this is a new test for them, you see? Oh, this is a brand-new test for them. Usually He was with them, and when they couldn't do it, or when they couldn't believe, He'd step right in and take over. But now He left them on their own, and He's giving them a sample – listen – of the way it is going to be pretty soon when He's gone. And the way it is for you and me.

He's starting to cut the cord, see? He's starting to turn them loose, to leave them on their own. And now watch. As He begins to let them go on their own, He starts to teach them a profound lesson. That everything you want, everything you need isn't necessarily going to come the first time you ask God. Did you get that? Did you get that? That's the lesson.

You see, they said, “Come out.” Didn’t come out. Maybe they said, “Come out.” Didn’t come out. Maybe they said, “Come out.” Didn’t come out. “Can’t do it; God can’t do it.” You know what little faith is? It’s the kind of stuff that doesn’t know how to persist in prayer. Did you get that? It doesn’t know how to persist in prayer.

Now, when they were young and they were new, He responded immediately. And have you noticed that that very often happens with new Christians? They come to Jesus Christ, and they start to pray and ask the Lord for things, and they come very fast. Because they just have a little faith to start with, and the Lord wants to strengthen that. And some of us who’ve been a Christian a long time, and we ask the Lord for something, and it seems like He’s not even there. And we ask Him again, and it seems like He’s not even there. And after two or three times, you say, “Well, it’s obvious He’s certainly not interested in this project.” And we exercise little faith. Little faith.

But the Lord is strengthening us. The longer you’ve been a Christian, the tougher the test has to be – right? – to strengthen you. Like when you start lifting weights, you start with a little bit, and you see it right away. But the longer you do it, the more weight you have to add to do any good. And so, the trials and testings that God gives us get longer and harder as we go, because that’s how he continues to strengthen us.

Now, the Lord was available to these nine disciples, but He was testing, “How long will you persist in prayer?” This is a marvelously comforting truth, beloved. Listen to it. Even these apostles, with their apostolic uniqueness and their gifts of miraculous healing, casting out of demons, were dependent on the prayer of faith to see the power work. And though we do not have apostolic gifts in terms of miracles and healing, we are too dependent on the power of faith.

You go to the Lord with a problem two or three times, nothing happens. You give up. Other people say, “You know, I’ve been praying for so-and-so to come to the Lord for two months.” Two months? The test is how long you are going to stay there? And let God strengthen your faith.

You see – follow now in the text and look what happens, verse 20, “You couldn’t do this because of your little faith.” And then He says, “If you” – and He says it seriously – “Verily I

say unto you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to a mountain, ‘Move,’ and the mountain would move.”

And, you know, you read that, and you say, “Now, wait a minute. You just said we had little faith, and now you tell us if we had faith as little as a grain of mustard seed, and that’s the littlest seed that was known in that part of the world. What are you saying? You just said we had little faith, and that’s why we couldn’t do it. Now you tell us if we had a little faith we could do it.”

No, most people misinterpret that mustard seed. The principle of the mustard seed is not that it’s little, no. The principle of the mustard seed is that it is little, and it does what? It grows. Do you remember that principle? It’s in Matthew 13. Sure, you remember it, verse 31, “Another parable He put forth unto them, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all seeds. But when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs and becomes a tree so the birds of air come and lodge in the branches of it.’” And what you’ve got in the mustard seed is something that starts very, very small and grows very large.

Now, what is our Lord saying? Watch, “If you had the faith that is illustrated in a mustard seed, you would start out small, but your faith would” – do what? – “it would grow and increase.” And that’s an indictment portfolio them. They started out with a little bit of faith, and they just bailed out.

Beloved, I believe there are many things that God desires for you to experience in your life that God desires to accomplish in your life that are available to you through the exercise of His divine power. But that power will never be tapped until you have the faith that starts small, and when it meets with resistance, and when you don’t see it happen, the faith doesn’t die small; it gets larger and larger and larger. And you continue persistently in prayer.

Would you look with me at Luke chapter 11 as we wrap up our thinking with just a few closing thoughts? In Luke 11, verse 5, “And He said unto them, ‘Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves’” – I mean you’ve got a friend, and you go to his house at midnight to borrow some bread, or buy some – ““and

a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him”? And he, from within, shall answer and say, “Trouble me not.”“”

I mean you’re saying, “Look, I’ve got a guest; he just arrived. I can’t feed the guy. Get out of bed and give me some bread.”

And the guy inside says, “Hey, don’t bother me.”

“““My door is shut; my children are with me in bed.”“” And that tells us a lot about how they used to sleep. They all used to get in the same bed to keep warm. Some of us can identify with that: those of us who’ve raised kids, waking up in the morning with two little feet by your head.

He says, “I can’t get out of bed; I’m all snuggled in here with the whole gang. I get up and everybody’s going to get up. We’re inextricably tangled in this deal.

““And I say unto you, “Though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity, he will rise and give him as many as he needs.”“” You know what “importunity” means? His persistence. I mean the guy just says, “Please? Please? Please? Get up, I need the bread,” and just goes on and on. And he won’t do it for a friend, but he’ll do it to get rid of the guy.

And he goes on to make the point that if a guy’ll give you something to get rid of you, what’ll God do for you when He loves you and when He wants you to come? But the same lesson is true. He wants you to persist in prayer because that’s the extent of your faith. You see, if just said, “God, I want this,” “You got it,” you’d never learn to strengthen your faith. You’d never be ready for the trial, would you?

And so, the Lord asks us to persist and persist. And you have the same thing in the eighteenth chapter of Luke, in that marvelous opening passage there. There was a judge, who feared not God nor man, and a widow. And she came, and she wanted vengeance. And the judge wouldn’t give it. And so, she came and troubled him and kept coming, and kept coming, and kept coming, and kept coming, and kept coming. And he said, “You know, this woman is

driving me out of my mind.” Finally responded. If an unjust judge will do that, what’ll God do, who’s a just and loving God?

Let’s go back to Matthew chapter 17 there. You see, that’s the lesson here. The disciples started on the project, but they ran out of faith, and they didn’t see their answer immediately. And the Lord said, “If you had faith like a mustard seed, which starts small and gets bigger and bigger, you would have been able to do it.

Now, let me just tell you something about this verse, please. It is not saying that if you had a little, tiny faith the size of a grain of mustard seed, that you could say, “Mountain be removed.” It’s not talking about literal mountains; it’s talking about mountains of difficulty. It’s figurative.

In fact, when the Jews – by the way, this was a rather common Jewish phrase – when the Jews talked about removing mountains, they used it in reference to the ability to get past difficulties or to remove difficulties.

One writer says, “A great teacher who could really expound and interpret Scripture, and who could explain and resolve difficulties was known as an uprooter or a pulverizer of mountains. To tear up, to uproot, to pulverize mountains were all regular phrases for removing difficulties.”

Jesus never meant this to be taken physically and literally. After all, the ordinary man seldom finds any necessity to remove a mountain. What He meant was, if you have faith enough, all difficulties can be solved, and even the hardest task can be accomplished. And then He says it at the end, in verse 20, “Nothing is impossible to you.” But nothing, it’s conditional.

You see, He was saying to the apostles, “Nothing is impossible to you, which was in the framework of my promise to you.” Right? “I promised you could do these things, and it’s possible.” It’s only possible, first of all, if it’s within the framework of God’s will and God’s promise. So, don’t make that so broad that it means nothing is impossible. It has to be qualified somehow, and it’s qualified by the promise of God, “I promised you’d could do this, and you can do it if you have faith that grows. I want to stretch your faith; I want you to learn to trust me, so you’ll be able to trust me in the extreme tests. And I have to let you out a

little bit at a time. What he disciples should have done, when they didn't heal the man in the first, second, or third time was to keep on praying, and keep on trusting, and keep on believing God till their persistent prayer broke through and reached its point where God wanted them to learn, and then God would have responded. It isn't that they had to batter down heaven to get his attention; it is that God knew exactly what he was going to do, but He withheld it in order that they might continue to stretch their faith. It's a great lesson.

The principle is clear. The disciples couldn't heal, even though they had a promise. They couldn't heal even though they had available power, because they weren't persistent in prayer. And the lesson for us is, beloved, God is giving us promises. Oh, my. Promise for wisdom; promise to meet all our needs; promise for comfort, peace, joy, virtue, strength, safety, protection, deliverance, fruit. The promise of guidance, promise of forgiveness, promise of freedom, promises, promises. And He's given us power in the Spirit of God. And yet, very often we don't experience the fulfillment of the promise in God's power because we don't know the persistence of prayer that keeps on praying until God responds.

And that's why, you see, the story ends. Verse 21 says, "Howbeit this kind goes not out except by prayer." Now, let me tell you something about this verse. The terms "and fasting" are not there in the original text; someone added them.

Matthew 2:19 says, "This is not a time for fasting when the Bridegroom is present." And verse 21 isn't even in the best manuscripts of Matthew; it's borrowed from Mark's account. But it is at the end of Mark's account. The story does end with this statement. So, somebody, some scribe thought it capped off Matthew's account. So, he pulled it over and put it here. And that's fine, in a sense, because it is the ending of the story in Mark 9:29. And what the Lord says in the end is, "This kind goes not out except by prayer." And listen to me very carefully then; the antidote to little faith is – what? – prayer. Persistent prayer.

Listen, James says it, "The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man" – what? – "availeth much." Effectual, dedicated, fervent, passionate, continuous, persistent prayer gets results. You may never know the full promise of God. You may never know the full blessedness of God. You may never know the full reward that all – of all that God wants to bestow upon you until you learn persistent prayer. More than half-a-century ago, George Mueller, prince of intercessors, began to pray for a group of five friends. Five friends. After five years, one of

them came to Jesus Christ. After ten years, two more of them came to Christ. He prayed for 25 years, and the fourth man was saved. And for the fifth, he prayed until the time of his death. And that fifth friend came to Christ a few months after George Mueller died. For that fifth friend, he prayed for 52 years. Perseverance. Have you bailed out already? If you do, you miss the power of God.