

Jesus Makes Mountains Disappear

Mark 9:20-29 ²⁰ Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. ²¹ So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. ²² "And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." ²³ Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things *are* possible to him who believes." ²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" ²⁵ When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!" ²⁶ Then *the spirit* cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, "He is dead." ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. ²⁸ And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" ²⁹ So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."

This entire miracle is one that speaks to us about faith. In life we meet obstacles. Sometimes these obstacles are small, sometimes they are large, and sometimes they seem large at the time but later we find that they weren't really that big of deal.

These obstacles might sometimes tempt us to just give up. However, when we put our trust in Jesus and believe in his promises and his power we can quite easily move mountains. That is to say whether the problem is large or small, whether the problem seems as unmovable as granite, or like quick sand, if we trust Jesus we will get past it.

Getting past such mountains might mean that they disappear from right in front of us. It might mean that we have to climb over them, or that we walk right through them without even realizing they are there. Obstacles can take many different forms in our life and their solutions can also come in many different forms, but if we just wait and trust Jesus we will get past them.

Has Jesus failed?

Often when we encounter obstacles in our life we are quick to jump to the conclusion that Jesus has failed, or at least his promises have failed. We see this all over our text. The disciples try to heal this boy and when they cannot everyone assumes Jesus has failed. Jesus is not what he claims.

When the disciples cannot heal this boy, the scribes start arguing with Jesus' disciples. It does not say what they were arguing about. But it does not take much of an imagination to guess that they were arguing that Jesus was not the Christ. See his disciples cannot heal this boy. He must not really be the Christ. He does not have the power that he claims.

This would certainly explain Jesus' response when he hears the scribes and his disciples arguing. "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you." Just because the disciples could not immediately heal this boy therefore Jesus must not be the Christ.

It certainly is the attitude of the man. He comes to Jesus and says "If you are able." There is another man a centurion who says to Jesus, "I know you can. You do not even have to come to my house. Just speak the word and my servant will be healed." There is no doubt in that man's mind that Jesus is able. And Jesus says of him "I have never seen such great faith." But this man here says, "if you are able." He does not have great faith in Jesus. He is willing to ask Jesus out of desperation, but his faith is very weak.

This miracle here actually has a lot of connection to the old testament story of the golden calf. If you have your bibles, you can look it up in Exodus 32. Moses went up the mountain to speak to God. He went up into a cloud. He spoke to God for 40 days and 40 nights. When he came down, he found that the people no longer believed in God but were worshipping an idol, a golden calf. Because they had to wait 40 days the people gave up on God and decided he cannot save us we need a new god. They ran into a small obstacle, they had to wait 40 days, and they gave up.

This account here takes place immediately after the mount of transfiguration. Jesus goes up the mountain to speak to the Father. He goes up into the cloud. When he comes down again, he finds the people, his disciples, the scribes, this man, have lost faith. They ran into a small obstacle, they couldn't heal this boy, and they were ready to give up.

But of course, God hadn't failed the Israelites in the wilderness and Jesus didn't fail this man. He healed the boy without any trouble.

The NIV has a better translation of verse 23 than the NKJ does here.

Mark 9:23 "'If you can?'" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes."

The "if you can" is not a challenge to the man as though Jesus is saying, "if you have enough faith then I will heal your son." Rather it is a rhetorical question. "If you can?" You doubt that I am able. Just trust me, anything is possible.

Trust in the power and promises of Jesus. We might have to wait forty days or sometimes forty years. But it is not his power that has failed. Wait and trust in the Lord, all things are possible.

So if it is not the power of Christ that has failed was it the faith of the disciples or the man?

Now there is no doubt that the faith of the man was very weak, seems like he might have given up completely. There is no doubt that the faith of the disciples was shaken by this incident. "why can't we cast it out?" So, in one sense yes their faith failed.

But the real question is not if their faith was shaken or failed but is that the reason why they could not heal the boy.

There are many people who would say yes, that is the problem. It is not God's fault. God's power cannot fail. Therefore, the problem must be with the disciples. Their faith was not great enough.

We are often tempted to think the same. If God is not answering my prayers, it must be something wrong with me. Perhaps I am not good enough. Perhaps I am not praying hard enough. Perhaps my faith is not great enough.

We even often receive such advice from well-meaning friends. You must do a better job, then you will get what you want. In our text Jesus says not, that is not what is going on here. That certainly is what the disciples think. In the gospel of Matthew, the disciples ask Jesus why could we not heal the boy?

Jesus responds, "Because you do not believe?" In other words, "Do you think it's because you do not believe? No that is not it."

Matthew 17:20 for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.

The size of your faith is not what makes the difference. The length of your prayers is not what makes a difference. Even the tiniest littlest faith can move mountains. Because it is not our faith that matters but the power of God and the promises of God.

If you turn on a light does the size of the switch matter? If you pack a mountain full of an explosive, does the size of the button matter? Is that what is important? No, it's the size of the bomb that matters. You can have the tiniest little button attached to a nuclear bomb. When you hit that button, the mountain disappears. It is gone.

It's not the size of the faith that matters, because the power isn't in the faith the power is in Christ. The size of the faith does not matter because it reaches out to Christ who has all power in heaven and earth.

The size of the disciple's faith and the size of the man's faith is not what makes the difference.

This man's faith is very weak. I do believe but I also have all this doubt he says to Jesus. And Jesus does not have any problems healing the boy.

This man sounds so much like me. Maybe you think he sounds like you to. I believe Jesus but I also have a lot of doubt. Yet, my sin and my doubt doesn't impede Jesus' power.

Jesus forgives your sin and answers your prayers anyway.

So, what is the problem? If it is not Jesus that failed, and it is not the faith of the disciples or that man that failed, then why weren't the disciples able to cast out the demon?

Jesus tells us "this kind comes out only with prayer and fasting." There was something about this sickness or this demon, something about this situation that did not respond to the normal way in which the disciples cast out demons. I do not really know why. Some people like to speculate. I could speculate but that would not really do us any good. And it does not really matter.

The whole point is the disciples were faced with a situation they did not understand. Instead of giving up and doubting Christ or questioning is it me, they should have simply prayed and waited on the Lord's will.

This is what obstacles are, problems in our life that we do not understand. Why is it taking Moses 40 days to come down the mountain? Why isn't this boy being healed? We do not know but we can trust God's promises.

Instead of giving up on Jesus. Instead of assuming there is something wrong. Just wait and yes it might take 40 years but Jesus' promises don't fail.

Amen