

Gospel of Matthew

17:14-23

... and It will Move



This is a troublesome teaching of Jesus for most people. As you read this, the first thing your mind sees is this statement that *if only* Christ-followers had even a miniscule amount of actual faith, we would be doing virtually anything we wanted. Let me clarify that. We should have anything we want within the limits of the tasks that Jesus and His Spirit have given us to do. I mean, even Jesus utilized His incalculable power only on behalf of His mission. He didn't just crinkle his nose or blink His eyes and a meal fit for a king appeared out of nowhere on steaming platters! That is not the way He used the power of the Holy Spirit or utilized the powerful angels He had at His disposal. He limited His use of power to the purposes to which He had dedicated Himself. Otherwise He lived as other men lived. He didn't fly (like He could have), but walked where He wanted to go. He could create food with a command – in great quantities – but he only did that a few times and then only to demonstrate that He had authority from God to teach the somewhat off-brand/unconventional things He was teaching the people. But aside from those instances, food that was purchased at the market and prepared by one of his disciples, probably his female disciples. He could have made clothes appear from nowhere and wrap themselves around Him, but that *never* happened. He wrapped *Himself* in His Middle Eastern garment every morning and fastened it just like every other man around Him did. But if you or I possessed the kind of power that Jesus possessed, I'm afraid we would use it like we had just won a 10 billion dollar lottery, and load up on luxuries and conveniences. We could ensure that Murphy's Law that states that "*whatever can go wrong will go wrong*" did not apply to us, so that everything, and I mean *EVERYTHING*, went perfect everyday! We could take over people's minds and make everyone love and respect us with no effort to earn that love or respect at all! We could put words in people's mouths so that they always agreed with us! We could correct all the evils of the world – the injustices, inequities, inaccuracies!



To possess the type of power Jesus is speaking of we would have to be ready to wield it - and the only one ever ready to wield that kind of power, EVER, has been Jesus! Moses was given a lot of power and used it to do some spectacular one-of-a-kind miracles, but then, one time he got mad and misused it – striking the rock instead of speaking to it as God had instructed, and God held him accountable. As good as Moses and God seemed to get along, God did not relent, and the verdict that Moses could not enter the Promised Land with the others, stood! He died of old age (120 yrs.) just before they entered the land. But if that abuse of God's power had not happened, the account indicates that God would have kept Moses alive for awhile so he could enter the land with the people that he had fought so hard for. If Moses was deemed by God to have wielded God's power in a way that was against God's wished, then who of us would be ready for that kind of power?!



But that would not please God, believe it or not, or Jesus would have done it! Someday in salvation history of the future, this *will* happen in due time, but not now when the world is still under the curse of Eden! Our timing and the Creator/God's timing would continually be clashing. We would be constantly underfoot, playing into Satan's hands rather than God's!



So, I pray for faith, but not faith that can move mountains, or faith that could part the seas. I'm pretty sure I couldn't handle it! Interestingly enough, the apostles did not use the power of the Holy Spirit in this manner. After Jesus had gone back into heaven, and they had the Holy Spirit to guide them, they utilized His power to heal people – even raising one or two, that we know of, from the dead! *Phillip was whisked away into the desert to testify to the Ethiopian eunuch of Jesus, and then whisked away again, but that was not of something he had anything to do with. He had not even known of the man before being taken from whatever he had been doing and set down in the Ethiopian's path! That was wholly of the Holy Spirit and the plan of God to spread the gospel in North Africa, probably where the descendants of the Queen of Sheba were. The queen had been introduced to the true God centuries before by King Solomon and had taken her knowledge of God back with her. She had certainly influenced her county with the knowledge of the the greatness of the One True God – the God of Israel!

Vs. 14,15 - The text begins with a broken-hearted father pleading with Jesus to heal his son who was being plagued by a demon or demons that were causing seizures in him that seemed to happen at the most inopportune moments – like around fire or water. This was endangering His life! The father adds that the disciples of Jesus had tried to cast out the demons but had failed. This failure by the disciples quickly becomes the focus of the text. Jesus seems to be greatly irritated or disturbed by His disciples inability. He seems to lump them with their entire generation, which He classified as “**unbelieving**” and “**perverse**”! Fallen human nature IS a frustrating thing for a pure, holy, all-powerful God to continually come up against, as Jesus did. Do you think God can get frustrated with us? If you do, I think you are right! There is no mistaking the annoyance and exasperation of Jesus in the text! “*How long will I have to put up with this?!*”



I don't blame Him a bit. I get discouraged and disappointed with **me**! Do you get irritated with,.. you?! We **should** be anguished, disgusted, grieved - because by this point in our spiritual journey, we should be beyond some of the things that still stick to our souls and have us mired in ungodly, un-Christ-like ruts! Unforgiveness, resentment, careless and unloving words, lust, unkindness, judgmentalism, hypocrisy, critical attitude, selfishness. How about a bitter, suspicious, angry, and unkind thought life?! The things we say about others in our own mind! Scandalous! How about gluttony, or gossip, or materialism? What about fear, or envy and jealousy, the desire for vengeance. How about our immoral entertainments? I mean, think about where that garbage comes from – from Hollywood - from the movie, TV, and publishing industry; from people who have **everything** morally upside down! How much can we tolerate before finally saying “**enough!**” What about stealing the tithe from God so we have more to spend on ourselves? I mean, pick your poison! Why are **any** of these maintaining a foothold in our lives, when we have the most selflessly kind, patient, and loving, and generous Savior, the living Jesus, Christ?! How can we indulge in these wrong and ungodly things even occasionally, when we know it displeases and frustrates our Father God, His Son, and His Spirit who resides inside of us?! 5

Could it be because we don't believe, not nearly as much as we think or say we do?! Do we want to live in both Kingdoms – the Kingdom of Light and the Kingdom of Darkness? We certainly have busied ourselves acting like it! Every one of those attitudes and behaviors keeps a foot in the door of the Kingdom of Darkness, making us vulnerable, and available to be used by Satan. When we do these things, the Destroyer has got something on us that He can, and will, exploit! He will use us to frustrate, to slow the work of God – in our families, in our churches, and in our communities. Do you believe that? You better!



*My last church I called my “*fighting church*”. They seemed to love to fight. Too many of the people there were able to justify indulging their sinful natures to wreak havoc within that church. After our successful building project, the church was exhausted and discouraged from infighting throughout the process. Mistrust, suspicion, whining, gossip and slander, name calling, gamesmanship, power struggle, innuendo, negative speculation, outright fabrications – but it was all being done by people who said they loved Jesus and who just wanted the right thing to be done. But they justified the most ungodly attitudes and behaviors to ensure that the right thing (in their opinion) was done. It was the most discouraging display I have ever encountered – bewilderingly evil, because every person knew better – which make it all the more dark and evil and destructive! This is the kind of thing Christians expect from the world, but to see other Christians giving themselves permission – well, that’s devastating!

For the next 25 years that church floundered and almost died! Satan had a field day! They had a community around them that needed Jesus. But they never gave Him to them!

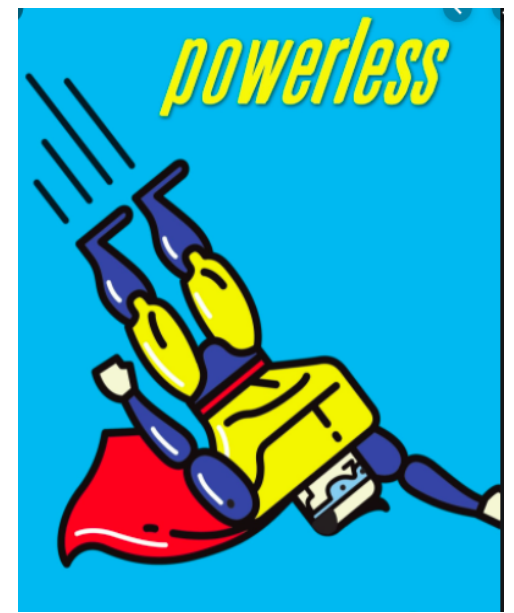
Vs. 17,18 - Jesus, almost nonchalantly, calls the boy over and effortlessly casts out the rotten demon that had been plaguing the boy and causing him (and his family) to suffer so badly! And the boy was healed – his problems with seizures vanished immediately and a grateful and joyous father and son are able to go home and live in peace.



So the disciples come to Jesus and ask Him why they could not cast this particular demon out of the boy. They evidently had been casting demons out of others without this kind of unyielding resistance. And Jesus lectures them about their lack of faith. He indicates that it should have been easy for them.

But humans do not find faith to be an easy thing! None of us do! We've all seen God say "no" many times and we can't help but suspect that we are asking amiss – asking Him to do something He does not want to do. Jesus certainly knew that better than anyone! We know that some Christ-followers have the spiritual gift of faith, and healings occur because they seem to have less doubt than others. But to anyone's knowledge, no one has moved a mountain yet! But still, Jesus chides His disciples, and says if they only had a miniscule amount of faith – the "*size of a mustard seed*", which is just a bit bigger than a poppy seed, they could move a mountain!

I think Jesus was trying to impress two things upon his disciples. The first is their own human inadequacy. They can't do *anything* impressive on their own! *How different from our words of encouragement to kids, for instance. They can do no wrong! If they try and fail, at least they tried! You know how we are! But Jesus says that His closest disciples can do no right – *and they couldn't*! Not in themselves! They were totally dependent upon the power of God! *He* is doing this, and they are not! They just access His power, but in themselves they have not the slightest bit of power! They NEVER had power! Now *that* is real! That is a completely accurate and factual assessment by Jesus! *It is also how God wants it!* He wants us to repudiate original sin in ourselves. Original sin occurred when human fell prey to the temptation that they could be like God if only they disobeyed Him and do what comes naturally! So the acknowledgment that we are not God and cannot do, in any way, what He can – well, that's critical! We have to do that before we can follow Jesus! That is giving up our preposterous ambitions to take over for God and call our own shots and live our lives in whatever way we choose! It is terribly important to acknowledge that we can't do that!





So the second important acknowledgment is that God has all the power and we ***embrace*** it - that this is as it should be! We are absolutely content under His rule, and we thrive within the hierarchical structure of His Kingdom, where He is preeminent and we are subservient – not only to Him but to all the others in His kingdom. Let me tell you, brothers and sisters, being subservient to each other requires faith! Acting

humbly, loving the next person with a love that rivals the love you have for yourself - bestowing generous gifts of **optimism, kindness, good humor, patience, affirmation, problem solving, empathy & compassion**, you become the **oasis of God** in a world, in a life that is by its very nature, fallen and malevolent! By being subservient, the peace of God is not only planted in your own heart but you are planting and reproducing the Fruit of the Spirit in the lives of everyone around you, because you have chosen to be content in the the Kingdom of God where He is preeminent and you are happily subservient!

Then, when you have a church community that have a high percentage of these people who believe enough to trust God to the point of subservience to Him and others, you have a ***church*** that is an oasis in the desert! You come and fall into the pews in relief! You are in the presence of people you can trust like no other group of people in your world! Now you are an oasis of God within a larger oasis because you are a functioning part of this strong, good, healthy organic structure we call “CHURCH”. You do your best before God to contribute to its peace, its strength, its mission to **build up and send out, build up and send out, build up and send out!** Now, together you have a church filled with faith, overflowing with thanksgiving to God and ready to serve Him powerfully – to move mountains, as it were in His quest to win the world!

The disciples were going to need faith, and a lot of it, if they were going to ever begin to meet the objective of Jesus to take on the world and take it back for its Creator!



Jesus would be asking His followers to move the planet by the power of the Holy Spirit - to cause a seismic shift in creation so that God might expand His Kingdom and save the earth and the creatures on it made in His image that were otherwise lost to Him!