

Finding Jesus

Embracing the Complete Gospel of Jesus, the Christ.



FOURTH FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

Faith, Mountains, and Mustard Seeds.

Foundational Truth.

IV. Faith, Mountains, and Mustard Seeds.

“The kingdom of heaven is like...”

Jesus liked to use parables, short stories that explain complex ideas in simple terms. Altogether, He told twenty-four parables which are recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

In eight of the eleven parables recorded in Matthew (see the list of these scriptures below) Jesus begins with *“The kingdom of heaven is like...”* and in the rest He says *“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to...”*

Matthew 13:24

Matthew 13:45

Matthew 20:1

Matthew 13:31

Matthew 13:47

Matthew 22:2

Matthew 13:33

Matthew 13:52

Matthew 25:1

Matthew 13:44

Matthew 18:23

Here and in many other places, Jesus literally taught what the “kingdom of heaven” was like, and in the Lord’s Prayer He taught that the will of God is for “kingdom of heaven” to be established on earth.

Parable of a mustard seed.

13 ³¹He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³²it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

Matthew 13:31-32 ¹

The Parable of the Mustard Seed compares the smallest of seeds that grow into large bushes or trees with the germination of the kingdom of heaven; even from a tiny seed, the kingdom of heaven can produce results far greater than thought possible.

¹ Other versions found at Mark 40:30-32 & Luke 13:18-19.

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This idea of small beginnings resulting in outsized outcomes is found throughout Biblical history. A few of my favorites are Joseph's rise from slave to co-ruler of Egypt, Moses leading the people out of bondage, David and his mighty men resisting Saul, Gideon winnowing thousands down to 300 to defeat a mighty army, and many more.

From the smallest beginning great things can rise. With just a handful of disciples a movement that began with Jesus's life produced hundreds if not thousands of followers.

Against all odds the followers of Jesus, the Christ, would grow to become the largest religion of the empire in less than 300 years. Today, almost 2,000 years after His death this small seed is now the most powerful force for good in the world. Not bad for the smallest of seeds.

Faith the size of a mustard seed.

Having established the power a small seed can produce we come now to Jesus comparing the mustard seed directly to the power of the Kingdom of God on Earth as it is in heaven.

The Divinity of Jesus Affirmed.

The story of the healing of the epileptic son who the disciples could not heal happens just after Jesus appears on the mountain, along with Moses and Elijah, where "his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white." Peter, stunned by the appearance, asked Jesus if he should make "three dwellings" for them. But then...

13 ⁵While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground

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and were overcome by fear.⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid."⁸ And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

Matthew 17:5-8²

Having just shown Peter, James, and John His transfiguration, an event that confirmed His divinity, they came down from the mountain and were met by a crowd and a desperate man pleading for healing for his son.

"You faithless and perverse generation..."

Compounding the tension, the father states, "I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him." Among the crowd were some disciples of Jesus, likely those who did not go with Jesus up the mountain.

17¹⁴ When they came to the crowd, a man came to him, knelt before him,¹⁵ and said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; he often falls into the fire and often into the water."¹⁶ "And I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him."¹⁷ Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him here to me."¹⁸ And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly.

Matthew 17:16-18³

Jesus rebukes His disciples for not having the faith to believe that His gift of the power of healing was real, thus failing in their attempts to heal this boy.

2 Additional scriptural background found at Matthew 17:1-4.
Other versions found at Mark 9:2-10 & Luke 9:28-36.

3 Additional scriptural background found at Matthew 17:14-21.
Other versions found at Mark 9:14-29 & Luke 9:37-43.

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We should always remember, Jesus was fully human as well as fully divine and I, for one, give Him grace for calling them out for thinking they could say the words without true, deep, and total assurance that God's power is real and available for them to use in establishing the Kingdom of God on Earth.

To Jesus, this sacred gift was not to be casually treated. I can feel the tingle of righteous anger and indignation in Jesus's words at their failure to take Him seriously. Can't you?

The last phrase of verse 17 and verse 18 seem almost anti-climactic. "*Bring him here to me.*" And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly."

"Why could we not cast it out?"

The disciples accepted the harsh words of Jesus, and, in private, asked, "Why could we not cast it out?" And Jesus, now speaking softly, answered their question with, "*Because of your little faith.*"

17 ¹⁹ Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" ²⁰ He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of 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."

Matthew 17:19-20 ⁴

His explanation of "little faith" establishes a model for turning "little faith" into mountain-moving faith which contains four elements (faith, mustard seed, move, and mountain). These four elements will guide our thoughts and actions in establishing the Kingdom of God on Earth.

⁴ Additional scriptural background found at Matthew 17:14-21, Mark 9:14-29 & Luke 9:37-43a, 5:6.

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FAITH. MUSTARD SEED. MOVE. MOUNTAIN.

For followers of the Gospel of Jesus “faith” is a misunderstood word. There are many degrees of faith such as faith in gravity or the sun will rise tomorrow. Faith that a chair is sturdy enough to hold me. Faith that my favorite team will play well.



“Faith” is accepting as true something that cannot be proven objectively. It also seems that faith has a future element to it. Something we believe, think, hope, or expect to happen.

Consider those who witnessed, first-hand, the resurrected Christ. They knew without any doubt that Jesus died and then appeared to them after His death. There was nothing more that could be done to convince them of this truth, or to change their minds. They were called “believers,” people who had seen and know without any question that what they experienced did happen.

But as the story was passed down from generation to generation the meaning of faith moved from a personal belief in the power to do astonishing things through Jesus, the Christ, to a reliance on trusting the “church” to provide spiritual guidance and intervention in their lives.

Eventually, after 1,500 years, the tension of personal faith in Jesus, the Christ, or faith in the church to “move mountains” resulted in the Reformation. Protestants wanted the church out of the line of authority in favor of a direct relationship with Jesus, the Christ.

Is “Faith” different from “Belief?”



“Faith” is a sincere hope that something is true even if it can’t be proven by objective means. “Belief” is knowing that something is true based on personal observation or widely accepted evidence.

Faith can also apply to existential concepts like life or death, victory or defeat, or catastrophic disaster (weather, earthquake, volcano,

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wildfire), usually involving faith that these things will not happen, or happen to us, or happen imminently.

Faith can be the hope that illness or death can be cured, accidents or trauma stopped, an outcome reversed, an errant child returned to the right path.

For many it is practical, "I have faith when I apply the brake my car will slow down." Or "My faith in you to do the right thing is genuine and well earned."

Faith also contains an element of doubt in the form of a safety net. Our human experience is we have faith, but that faith is often unfulfilled, and when that happens, we have a variety of choices. We can disregard the original faith by thinking, "How could I have thought it was probable?" Or we develop a 'plan B' which usually consists of lowering our 'faith-pectations.'

FAITH.	MUSTARD SEED.	MOVE.	MOUNTAIN.
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In Matthew 17:20, Jesus answered the disciples' question about their inability to heal the boy with, "*Because of your little faith... if you have faith the size of a mustard seed...*" He reminded the disciples of His parable about mustard seeds, particularly their small size and their capacity to grow into something far bigger than might be thought.

Most importantly the mustard seed represented the power of the Kingdom of God. The problem isn't that Jesus wants us to have more faith, He wants us to have pure faith. The faith that He is the Son of God. Absolute belief that Jesus is the Son of God and by asking something in His name establishes the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Faith for a Christian is not believing that God will heal a loved one; rather it is believing God has the *power to heal a loved one... or not*. After all, God's ways are not our ways as Isaiah makes clear.

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55 ⁸“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Isaiah 55:8-9 ⁵

! How can our faith help facilitate the answer we seek? For instance, asking God to heal someone of a disease includes not just a miracle, it also includes what we can do, personally, to improve the situation. In many cases, we can provide access to services that help and support the availability of those services in our community, even in our nation and the world.

Faith, like love, isn't passive. Faith is active preparation and action on our part to make the path possible for the mountain to move, if not in our lifetime, then in the future when others have joined in the effort to change what we think is impossible.

Remember, for God, nothing is impossible.

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! Our faith does not move the mountain, God moves it. Trusting God to move the mountain through His power is activated by the faith we have in God for who He is.

Jesus, in Matthew 19:26, states, *“For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.”*⁶

! “Move” takes two forms for the follower. 1) Is “to move God to perform a miracle” which is an event where God is circumventing the natural order to do something extraordinary. 2) Is “to move ourselves to do more than we thought or believe is possible.”

⁵ Additional scriptural background found at Isaiah 55:6-7.

⁶ Additional scriptural background found at Matthew 19:23-26, Mark 10:23-27 & Luke 18:18-26.

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Move God to perform a miracle that only God can do.

The Gospel of Jesus records His miracles that can be categorized as healing, raising the dead, feeding multitudes, rebuking demons, and more.

Throughout history, what was perceived as a miracle was not the healing, per se, but the scientific discovery and development of cures for diseases and conditions that in earlier times appeared to be miraculous but now are commonplace.

The miracle often is in the right person, at the right time, adding to human knowledge powerful ideas and insights that have transformed the world as we know it.

Even when a miracle seems needed, we must remember that we, as ushers along with Jesus, have something we can contribute.

Move ourselves to do more than we think or believe is possible to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth.

We all have knowledge, experience, and connections that we can call upon to add value to almost any solution. The challenge is do we have faith that we have something vital to add to a seemingly impossible situation.

If we have the faith to ask God for a miracle, certainly that same faith applies to me and you, finding what we have to offer, then doing it. If this is true, why aren't more Followers of Jesus, the Christ engaging their knowledge, experience, and connections more readily?

Could it be that we have "little faith?" And that the solution is right there in Matthew 17:20, *"if you have faith the size of 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."*

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In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus tells the story of “The Last Judgment” using sheep and goats to portray those who lived according to the Kingdom of God on Earth or didn’t.

In this story the sheep are those who serve ‘the least of these’ with faith and purpose, and don’t realize that they are doing something special. They are heaven bound. But the goats choose not to serve ‘the least of these’ to their peril. They are destined to eternal punishment.

Jesus says we should take seriously our role in ushering in the Kingdom of God on Earth, using the faith we have.

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For decades of my life, I thought anything was possible with my sincere belief that God would make it happen. It says so, I thought, in this famous quote from Jesus, recorded in Matthew 17:20,

17²⁰ . . . if you have faith the size of 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.” Matthew 17:20

This seemed to me to be reinforced by Paul in his letter to the Philippians 4:13, *“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”* (Also see Philippians 4: versions.)

In effect, through my earnest belief, and the promises of Jesus and Paul, I thought what I strongly desired could manifest through the power of Jesus.

On the surface this made sense. It wasn’t until later, that I realized that what I strongly desired for my life doesn’t always happen despite my earnest belief and relying on the promises of Jesus.

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When I finally realized that my desires, and what God wants for me, are often very different things, and that I cannot read God's mind for what He wants for me specifically, I began to understand that God has already told me what it is He wants for me in general.

He wants me to conform to what Jesus taught about establishing the Kingdom of God on Earth and expects me to apply the Gospel of Jesus to my life and the lives of people in my life.

We all face mountains in our lives. Some are mountains of our own making, others are beyond our understanding, and still others are beyond the realm of possibility.

Jesus faced mountains, too. Some He climbed with divine intervention. Others He taught His Followers to rely on their faith in Him and His Father to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth.

It's interesting that when you stand at the foot of a mountain or high cliff it looks impossible to climb. But, seen from a distance, the mountain appears small, and climbable.

Some mountains require miracles...when God circumvents the natural order to do something extraordinary.

If a mountain requires God circumventing the natural order to do something extraordinary, all that can be expected is that God may choose to intervene. His intervention may well be a mystery we cannot understand, but we should still apply our faith, energy, and effort to move the mountain.

Other mountains are of our own making.

Some are beyond our ability to overcome them. In my life, these mountains have included the serious health of those I love, the loss of a job, the loss of a child at birth, parenting a troubled teenager, aging pains, depression, and a slowly deteriorating brain injury. These mountains, and

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dozens more, are part of life, each with its part to play in who I am and have become.

We cannot reverse the role these types of mountains play in our lives, but we can, and should, engage the internal shadows they cast such as fear, anxiety, loneliness, worthiness, grief, and loss of friends. These draw deeply on our faith to grapple with them, especially in the toughest battleground of all – our mind.

Even with the faith Jesus talks about, some mountains can't be moved, not because we don't have faith, but because "my ways are higher than your ways," says the Lord.

A dear friend says it this way! "When things happen in life that are awful and unexplainable – TGA: trust God anyway."

Our faith still overcomes by providing us His hope, His peace, His comfort, His arm around our shoulder, and His shoulder to cry on. Paul speaks eloquently to this in Philippians.

4 ⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7 ⁷

All Things Are possible.

In addition to speaking of faith that moves mountains, Jesus also spoke of belief to do the impossible. In the passage below, only Mark records a brief interaction between Jesus and the father of the possessed boy.

9²¹ Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. ²²It has often cast him

⁷ Additional scriptural background found at Philippians 4:4-5.

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into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.”²³ Jesus said to him, “If you are able! — All things can be done for the one who believes.”²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out, “I believe; help my unbelief!”²⁵ When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!”

Mark 9:21-25⁸

Here the father says, “but if you are able to do anything,” (v. 22b) and Jesus replies with emphasis, “*If you are able!*” (v. 23a). By repeating the man’s plea Jesus focused on the father’s unbelief giving him the solution, “*All things can be done for the one who believes*” (v. 23b) and the father immediately cried out, “I believe! Help my unbelief!” (v. 24) With that, Jesus healed the boy.

“What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.”

When Jesus spoke of doing the impossible in Mark 10:23-27, which is also found in Matthew and Luke, He gave two illustrations of how hard it is for some to enter the kingdom of God (vv. 23-25). Then He answered the disciples’ question, “*Then who can be saved?*” (v. 26b) with, “*For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.*” (v.27) (Also see Luke 18:24-26.)

10²³ Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”²⁴ And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go

⁸ Additional scriptural background found at Mark 9:14-29.
Other versions found at Matthew 17:14-21 & Luke 9:37-43, 5:6.

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through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God!²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”²⁶ They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?”²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.” Mark 10:23-27⁹

The context of His answer is that it is impossible to get into the kingdom of God in heaven without God doing the impossible and opening the doors to the kingdom.

Many have taken this phrase to mean the same thing as Mark 9:23b: *“All things can be done for one who believes.”* But entering the kingdom of God in Heaven is only possible by God providing, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ, the miracle of eternal salvation. Amen.

CONCLUSION.

God chooses to move mountains of despair, sorrow, anger, severe illness, and others beyond our ability to move them. We should pray for His intervention.

Jesus moves mountains with the power of the Kingdom of God on Earth through the active involvement of His Followers fulfilling what Jesus taught, promised, and commanded.

Waiting for God to act without engaging your role as a follower of the Gospel of Jesus is not what Jesus expects.

⁹ Additional scriptural background found at Mark 10:23-31.

Other versions found at Matthew 19:23-30 & Luke 18:24-30, 22:28-30.

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If history has taught us anything, it has been that yesterday's need for a miracle has been largely replaced by the effort, intellect, and passion of people seeking to discover and apply remedies that humans developed, many times by the inspiration to serve humanity as a follower of Jesus, the Christ.

Where do you stand?

What miracles from God have you witnessed?

What miracles have you experienced that were produced by followers of the Gospel of Jesus?

When a situation seems hopeless, what else can you do to usher in the Kingdom of God on Earth?

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While it is said that “Christ lives in us,” it doesn’t mean or guarantee that our lives reflect His presence in our lives. Only we, with our actions, can do that.

Jesus is with us, in us, ready to work through us, but only we can make that happen. Unless we decide to do something that reflects, and then do it, it won’t get done.

It’s not that we aren’t doing something, we are.

But are we doing what Jesus did? Are we doing it for those that Jesus cares most about, “the other(s)?” Are we doing it because Jesus expects, even commands, us to?

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