

Focus Text

“And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and, kneeling before him, said, “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he has seizures and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him.” And Jesus answered, “O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me.” And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” He said to them, “Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of 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 17:14–20, ESV)

Matthew 17:14–20 – Faith That Moves Mountains

Have you ever noticed that after an incredible “mountain-top” moment with God, real life can hit hard? That’s exactly what happened to Peter, James, and John. After witnessing Jesus’ transfiguration on Mount Hermon, they came down the next day to find trouble waiting—a crowd had gathered, and a desperate father begged for help for his son who suffered terrifying seizures. Scripture tells us the boy was even thrown into fire and water. His father was terrified.

The disciples who had stayed behind tried to help, but they couldn’t cast out the demon. This is surprising because, back in Matthew 10, Jesus had already given them authority over unclean spirits. Yet in this moment, they doubted—not that Jesus was powerful, but that *they* could carry out His command through that power.

Here at Good Shepherd, we talk about four pillars of spiritual growth: **learning, doing, sharing, and teaching.** This passage speaks to the “doing” pillar. Every believer is equipped with the Holy Spirit. There’s no such thing as a spiritually powerless Christian! But sometimes we slip into thinking only pastors or church leaders are “really” gifted, and the rest of us are just spectators. This story reminds us that Jesus empowers *all* of His followers.

8.9.2026 Discover the King “Mountain Moving” Matthew 17:14-20

When Jesus saw the situation, His response was direct: “You unbelieving and perverse generation... how long shall I be with you?” According to the scholar John Nolland, these words weren’t aimed at the crowd or the religious leaders—they were for the disciples. Jesus wasn’t being harsh out of anger. He was urgent because time was short, and He needed His disciples to grow in faith. He was preparing them for the day He would no longer physically be with them.

Later, in private, the disciples asked Jesus why they had failed. They probably wondered if they had said the wrong prayer or missed a step in the process. But Jesus gave them a hard truth: it wasn’t the method that failed—it was their faith. They saw how serious the boy’s affliction was and thought, “Only Jesus could handle this.” They didn’t fully believe that *His authority in them* was enough.

Jesus used the image of a mustard seed. In the ancient world, mustard seeds were considered weeds—they popped up everywhere, no matter the conditions. Even in dry summers, weeds seem to survive when everything else wilts. That’s the kind of faith Jesus is talking about: small but alive, persistent, and growing. Even a little faith in His authority can move mountains.

Application

Acts 1:6–8 reminds us that the Holy Spirit gives every believer power to be a witness for God’s kingdom. You don’t need to wait for a title or a stage—God has already equipped you.

This week, take time to journal and reflect:

1. Where have I been like the disciples, operating in timidity instead of trusting in the authority Jesus gave me?
2. Where is God inviting me to step out in faith, even if it feels small, and watch His work grow like a mustard seed?

Remember: Faith doesn’t have to be big to be real. It just has to be alive.

Additional Notes

“Demon possession has caused this illness, and the demons repeatedly try to harm the boy and threaten his life (cf. Mark 9:22), as they characteristically do with people they torment. Jesus has encountered similar problems frequently before; the key distinctive in this passage is his disciples’ inability to deal with the problem. Their impotence makes for a jarring return to the real world after the mountaintop experience of the transfiguration. Jesus had given the disciples full authority over demons as long ago as in 10:8. By now they should be performing exorcisms with great confidence.”¹

“Jesus’ fierce words can be provoked only by the failure of the disciples. Here the disciples represent the present generation in its failure to respond to the ministry of Jesus, much as ‘some of the scribes and Pharisees’ do in Mt. 12:38–39.”²

“It consists of an answer from the evangelist himself and the traditional Jesus saying about mustard seed faith. His own answer is: Failure in healing is an expression of little faith. Little faith is, as in 6:30*, 8:26*, 14:31*, and 16:8*, 39 faith that has become discouraged and lacks trust in God’s miraculous help. Thus Matthew does not think that healings and exorcisms are special experiences that sometimes happen and sometimes do not. He is much more “enthusiastic” and regards healings and exorcisms as experiences that are an essential part of faith. Where they are absent, faith has not lived up to its potential. “Little faith” must be overcome by actually laying claim to the power of Jesus”³

* 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?
Matthew 6:30 (NRSV)

* 26 And he said to them, “Why are you afraid, you of little faith?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm.
Matthew 8:26 (NRSV)

* 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”
Matthew 14:31 (NRSV)

* 8 And becoming aware of it, Jesus said, “You of little faith, why are you talking about having no bread?”
Matthew 16:8 (NRSV)

¹ Blomberg, Craig. 1992. Matthew. Vol. 22. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

² Nolland, John. 2005. The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

³ 39 Cf. vol. 1 on 6:30* and the interpretation above on 8:26*, 14:31*, 16:8*.

Luz, Ulrich. 2001. Matthew: A Commentary. Edited by Helmut Koester. Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.