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April 2018 “MUSTARD SEED FAITH”

Greetings in Jesus!

In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church he made the following statement:

I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. (1 Corinthians 3:6)

I have read and thought about that verse quite a lot. Over time, I have come to realize that it can apply to several areas of a Christian’s life. One of those areas is in our understanding of the Bible. Think of it this way: one preacher introduces us to a passage, over time we hear other ministers teach on the same passage, but God is the one who gives us the clear understanding of what has been written. He does this primarily through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

You see, the only way a preacher can genuinely preach truth is if the Holy Spirit has confirmed it to the heart of that preacher. Anyone can stand up and preach anything about various passages, but doing so can lead to much confusion. However, truth is the only thing the Holy Spirit will confirm. Also, truth is the only thing by which we can grow spiritually.

I want to give you an example of this. Two passages that had me quite stumped for a long, long time are these:

And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you. (Luke 17:5-6)

Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, 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, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. (Matthew 17:20)

In both of these passages Jesus is using a mustard seed as an example. In Luke, He says if your faith is like a grain of mustard seed, you can uproot a sycamine tree by speaking to it. The sycamine tree is one that has a very extensive and strong root system. Uprooting one even with today’s modern equipment would be extremely hard work. Therefore, telling the disciples that they could just talk to one of these trees and watch it jump up and get out of their way was quite a statement.

Then, over in Matthew, Jesus again tells the disciples that if they had faith like a mustard seed they could speak to something and make it move. Only, the something this time is a mountain! Moving a sycamine tree with your words is one thing, but moving a mountain is a different subject altogether.

I can't begin to tell you how many sermons I've heard preached on these two passages. Over and over again I was encouraged to have "mustard seed faith." I was told that if I had a mountain of a problem in my life, all I needed was faith the size of that mustard seed and I could move the mountain. Usually, such sermons were preached with a lot of emotion and enthusiasm and the congregations would shout and clap as they were motivated toward having that mustard seed faith.

But after the emotions wore off and I got my head out of the clouds, nothing I did seemed to move the mountainous problems of my life. So, I would sometimes go back and listen to the tapes of those powerful sermons and once again get myself all pumped up, "*Yes! I've got it! Mustard seed faith! Glory, Hallelujah... Thank You Jesus!*" But when I attacked the "mountains" and "sycamine trees", the results were still pathetic.

I'll have you know that after a while that cycle can get pretty discouraging. I mean, the preacher said that all I needed was faith the size of a mustard seed so I could start talking to my problems, then sit back and watch them tuck tail and run for their lives. Well, I reckoned that I just *had* to possess at least that much faith, but I couldn't figure out why it seemed as though the problems just stood and laughed at me while I spoke to them.

Finally, I came to the conclusion that my faith wasn't even mustard seed-sized. Boy, was that ever depressing! If my faith wasn't even the size of a mustard seed, I determined that it must be so miniscule that I would have trouble finding it under a microscope. This feeling of defeat was compounded by all the people who wore those cute, little necklaces with a mustard seed encased in acrylic. "*Yeah, that's right, go ahead and rub it in!*"

This went on for a *long* time. Then one day a few years ago I was reading those passages again and my attention was drawn to something I had previously missed. In both Matthew and Luke, Jesus said "*If ye had (or have) faith AS a grain of mustard seed.*" He hadn't said "faith the *size* of a mustard seed", but "faith *as* a grain of mustard seed." I read it over and over and no matter how many times I did, there was absolutely *nothing* in there about having mustard seed-*sized* faith to move mountains!

Suddenly, I got this weird, "*I've been duped*" feeling on the inside. I mean, it hit me like a ton of bricks, "*All of those mustard seed-size faith sermons have been **wrong!***" I felt so foolish! It meant that for years I had believed something that wasn't right. It meant that I had gone through a lot of needless feelings of utter failure and self condemnation. On the one hand I felt greatly relieved; but on the other I felt confused. If Jesus didn't mean that my faith was supposed to be the size of a mustard seed, then what in the world was He teaching?

As I went back and read those verses a few more times, the message became very clear. Jesus was comparing faith to a mustard seed. He was saying that my faith needed to be *like* a mustard

seed. This meant there was something about a mustard seed that held my answer. So, if I could just discover what it was about the mustard seed that Jesus was talking about, then I would understand what was supposed to be happening with my faith.

I knew that in Luke 17 and Matthew 17, Jesus had spoken of a mustard seed. Since He was comparing faith to a mustard seed, was it possible that He had taught about the mustard seed somewhere else in the four Gospels? Sure enough, all I had to do was go back four chapters to Matthew 13 and there it was: another reference to the mustard seed!

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to 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 becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. (Matthew 13:31-32)

As I read these short, two verses, it was as though the Holy Spirit was taking me step by step, walking me through the understanding and making a connection between these verses and the mustard seed verses in Matthew 17 and Luke 17. I'll show you what I mean.

(Holy Spirit) What is happening with the mustard seed? (My response) A man is sowing it in his field.

After the mustard seed is sown, what happens? It begins to grow and keeps growing until it has become bigger than anything else in the field.

Was it always bigger than the other herbs in the field? No, apparently not. For a while, it was smaller than the other herbs. Then as it kept growing it became as big as, and then bigger than, the other herbs. But for a while, during the growing process, it was smaller than the other herbs.

What caused this mustard seed to grow? Well, whatever it is that provides nutrition to the mustard seed was supplied and it obviously received water because without the water, the fertilizer alone would only have a limited effect. It is possible that the man who planted it put fertilizer in the field and dug trenches for irrigation.

Would that have been an easy task? No. I'm sure that there were days when the man was tired or wanted to do other things. But he knew that if he wanted to reap the benefits of a healthy, fully-grown mustard plant, he had to do what was necessary.

So, when Jesus said that if your faith was like a mustard seed you could move a mountain, what was He telling you? Oh, wow! I get it! If my faith was like that mustard seed, it would grow and grow to the point that it would be bigger than the mountain I'm facing. The mountain would then be overpowered by my faith and it would be removed!

That's right. Now, let's take this further. What did the man do with the mustard seed? He sowed it in his field.

Do you know of any other teachings of Jesus that include sowing? Well, let's see... Oh yes, over there in Mark chapter four.

What did Jesus say you are to sow? He said that the sower soweth the word.

Do you know of any connection in the Bible between the Word and faith? Of course! Romans 10:17 says, "So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Wait... I'm starting to see all of this! In Matthew 13, the man sowed the mustard seed into his field. For me, the mustard seed represents the Word of God and the field represents my life. I am to sow God's Word in my life so faith will come. Then, I need to do what is necessary to cause my faith to grow. When I first sow the Word, it is like a tiny seed. As it begins to grow, it is still smaller than the problems. But eventually, it will become bigger than the problems and I can then use my faith to overpower them.

Very good! But don't stop there, take it even further. What would cause your faith to grow like a mustard seed? Well, since faith comes by hearing the word of God it stands to reason that the more of God's word I get into my life, the more faith will come.

That's right, and earlier you said that fertilizer alone wouldn't be enough, that the mustard seed needed water. Do you recall anything Jesus said about water? Yes. Over in John 7:38-39 it says, "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)"

And do you know of any connection between the Holy Ghost and faith? You bet I do! Jude 20 says, "But ye, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost." I think it's all very clear to me now. Jesus said if my faith is like a grain of mustard seed I can make mountains move. I sow the Word of God in my life and keep sowing so faith will come. Then I "water the seed of the Word" by praying in the Holy Spirit and I am built up, or I grow, in my faith walk. If I keep doing this, my faith will grow and grow to the point that I can remove the mountains and sycamine trees of problems that are in the field of my life.

Will this be an easy task? No. Like the man in the parable, there will be days that I am tired and don't feel like praying or getting in the Word. But if I want to reap the benefits of healthy, full-grown faith, then I must do what is necessary.

This is exactly what Jesus was trying to get across in the mustard seed parables. But when preachers keep emphasizing that all people need is faith the size of a mustard seed, Christians walk away from those sermons not having heard the truth! Those Christians then experience failure after failure by trying to overcome mountain-sized problems with faith that is weak and underdeveloped. But unless I am allowed to get involved in the teaching process, God cannot give the increase of understanding His Word and the

preachers will continue to incorrectly preach these things, unintentionally misleading Christians.

I can't begin to tell you how excited I was after the Holy Spirit helped me this way! From that day to this, every time I hear a "faith the size of a mustard seed" sermon, I cringe inside. Thank God for the ministry of the Holy Spirit!

I am guessing that some of you reading this may be understanding the "mustard seed faith" teaching from a whole new perspective. If you're like me, it makes you wonder how many other wrong explanations of scripture you've been trying to live by. But this entire process I've described holds true for any passage in the Bible. Get in the Word, stay in the Word, and let the Holy Spirit become your primary teacher. Spend more time with Him than any other minister of the Word and you will come to understand more and more truth.

May God's peace fill your life!

Jim

OUR 2018 PRAYER AND POWER CONFERENCE IS THIS MONTH!

It here! Our Prayer and Power Conference is from Sunday, April 22 - Friday, April 27. Sunday services will be 10:30 AM and 6:00 PM; Monday through Friday services will be 10:00 AM and 7:00 PM. We will also have pre-service worship 45 minutes prior to the start of every service. There is no charge to register or attend. Our host hotel is the Country Inn and Suites on Colonel Glenn Highway. The hotel website is: <https://www.countryinns.com/beavercreek-hotel-oh-45324/ohfairbo>. The hotel phone number is 1-937-429-2222. To receive our conference discount, contact the hotel directly, asking for the Grace Christian Center conference rate. For other hotels in the same vicinity, Google "hotels near Wright State University" and you will find many options.

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