

Faith That Can Move Mountains? How Does That Work?

1. Warm up: What was your favorite sport in this year's Winter Olympics – and why?
2. Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name. . . ." John 14:12.
 - a. Do you believe miracles still happen in our time? If so, why? If not, why?
 - b. What's one of your favorite Jesus' miracles recorded in the Gospels? Could you ever imagine yourself doing something like that? Why or why not?
3. The story told in our principal scripture for this past Sunday took place right after Jesus had been on a mountain praying. When he came back down, he encountered an unsettled crowd gathered around his disciples. Read Matthew 17:12-20, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Imagine you were the father of the epileptic boy in this story. What would have been your state of mind and emotions when the disciples tried, but failed to heal your son?
 - b. Why do you think Jesus got so frustrated? We normally think of Jesus as being so nicey-nice. Does it bother you that he got frustrated in this story? Is frustration a sin?
 - c. Jesus told the disciples that the reason they couldn't heal the epileptic boy was because of their "little faith." He then added, "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!" Matthew 17:20. A mustard seed is teeny-tiny. A mountain is ginormous. So what's Jesus trying to teach us in verse 20?
4. After saying we can move mountains with just a mustard seed of faith, Jesus added these key words, "And nothing will be impossible for you." When you say that something is not impossible, that means it's possible, *i.e.*, it **could** happen. Which is very different from saying something **will** happen. So what's the difference? And why does that difference matter as we try to better understand what it means to have faith?
5. Some churches teach a doctrine called "Name It and Claim It." Whenever you ask for something in prayer, they say you should claim that what you've asked for absolutely will happen. In support of this perspective they point to words like those found at the end of John 14:12 above, where Jesus says, "I will do whatever you ask in my name." Statements like that are sometimes taken to mean that you will get whatever you ask for in prayer if you explicitly say you're asking for it "in the name of Jesus." Jeff suggested that praying "in the name of Jesus" means something much deeper than just dropping Jesus' name into our prayers. He said it means praying in the way Jesus would pray and pointed us to the example of how Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Read Mark 14:32-36, as printed on p. 3.

- a. If Jesus wanted his cup of suffering to pass from him, why didn't he just name it and claim it? Why did he add the stuff about "not what I want, but what you want"?
 - b. What can we learn from how Jesus prayed here? Should we pray in the same way?
 - c. In James 4:3, Jesus' brother said, "You have not because you ask not. You ask and have not because you ask amiss." What does that mean? And what does it tell us about whether we can get anything we ask for in prayer?
6. To illustrate the magnitude of what's possible when we pray and act in faith, Jeff shared two modern miracle stories – one about a little girl whose massive brain tumor disappeared after a church prayer meeting, and another about a pastor who experienced the joy of God's goodness as he was dying from cancer. Jeff suggested both are equally monumental miracles – one being a miracle of deliverance **from** cancer, the other being a miracle of deliverance **through** cancer and death. Tell us about a time when you've experienced (or observed) a miracle of deliverance **from** or **through** something enormous.
7. Jeff suggested there are three basic ways to view the mountainous challenges we face in life: Predictive Thinking, Pessimistic Thinking, and Possibility Thinking. Read the definition of each on p. 3
- a. What's the danger of Predictive Thinking?
 - b. What's the danger of Pessimistic Thinking?
 - c. Why is Possibility Thinking so important to realizing God's best in our life?
 - d. Which of the foregoing three ways of thinking tends to hold greatest sway within you?
8. Hebrews 11:1 says, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for. . . ." Jeff encouraged us to view faith as being a substance comparable to other unseen energy forces (like Higgs boson particles) at work in our cosmos. He described faith as an invisible form of mystical spiritual energy that cannot (yet) be detected by human instruments, but is evident via the impact it has on physical circumstances in our world. Jeff described God's power as being like a stick of dynamite (a constant that's always there) and our faith as being the necessary spark to catalyze the release of God's power. What do you like or dislike about that way of conceptualizing faith and how it works?
9. ***Authentic followers of Jesus are people who live with a keen awareness of the possibilities of God and pray and act in ways that catalyze those possibilities!*** So, what's the greatest mountain you're confronting in your life right now? What beautiful possibilities can you envision in that situation? What would it look like for you to pray and act like you believe that one or more of these beautiful possibilities is truly possible?

Matthew 17:14-20

14 When they came to the crowd, a man came to him, knelt before him, ¹⁵and 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. ¹⁶And I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him.' ¹⁷Jesus 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.' ¹⁸And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly. ¹⁹Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, 'Why could we not cast it out?' ²⁰He 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.'

Mark 14:32-36

32 They went to a place called Gethsemane; and Jesus said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I pray.' ³³He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. ³⁴And he said to them, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.' ³⁵And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶He said, 'Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.'

Three Different Ways of Seeing Our Challenges

Predictive Thinking = The idea that if I just have enough faith, I can control the future and get anything I want to happen simply by using the name of Jesus when I pray.

Pessimistic Thinking = The idea that what has been is what will be now and forevermore. We're just victims here. We have no real power to shape the future. Just grin and bear it.

Possibility Thinking = The idea that nothing is impossible with God. So that every circumstance, even the worst, bristles with possibilities just waiting to be unleashed by our faith.