

Matthew 17:14-21

When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. "Lord, have mercy on my son," he said. "He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him." "O unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me." Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment. Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.

Before we begin today, I would like to explain what a parable is, and the difference between a parable and an allegory. A parable is a brief, to the point story, which illustrates a moral or religious lesson. A parable is a story with one point. A parable is the simplest of stories. It sketches a setting, and describes an action and its results. It often involves a person or persons facing a moral dilemma, or making a questionable decision and then suffering the consequences of that choice. A parable has only one point to make.

An allegory, on the other hand, is figurative and symbolic, not descriptive. An allegory is a story in which the characters and/or events are to be understood as representing other things and symbolically express a deeper meaning, often spiritual or moral. In an allegory, the characters are usually images of abstract concepts such as greed, envy, courage and the like. An allegory is simply a word-picture story, which can, and often does have multiple meanings.

A retired school teacher was asked prior to the start of school if he would consider taking over this certain class, a class which happened to have all the toughest students assigned to it. He agreed.

A few days before school started the teacher fell and injured his back and had to wear a body cast around the upper part of his body. It fit under his shirt and was not really noticeable. On the first day of the new school year, with the cast under his shirt, the teacher found himself walking confidently into his new rowdy classroom; he opened the window as wide as possible and then busied himself with desk work as the students arrived. A strong breeze continually blew in and made his tie flap up and down, so just before the teacher started he took his stapler out and stapled the tie to his chest. Discipline was never a problem from that day forth!

See, this teacher knew what he could do, he knew he had a cast under his shirt and that he could staple to it, but no one else knew of his capabilities. No one else could ever imagine this teacher would do what he did. The same is true for many of us today. We all have been given a measure of faith, faith we can do certain things, but with this faith just how far we are willing to, or how far will we go.

How far are you willing to step out in faith? How far will we climb out on that branch of life, relying solely on our faith? When jumping from one tree to another, a squirrel is not sure what branch he will land on when he jumps. See a squirrel has to risk everything if he doesn't want to spend his entire life climbing up and down every tree. So in order to branch out and cover much more ground the squirrel has to leave the security of the branch, his branch and jump.

Have you ever thought about your faith like that? Have you ever seen your faith as a living, growing thing? Did you know that God has plans for you and your faith? There are two kinds of faith, one which disturbs God, and one which God loves. God is disturbed by little unused and untested faith, on the other hand God loves time tested and constantly used faith.

Each one of us has been given a measure of faith, we are all given the same measure faith, and we are called to put this faith to the test. Romans 12:3 *"think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him."* We are to constantly use this faith, and not just use it to walk out to get the mail, or drive to

work, but we are expected to use this faith in ways which will not only test and strengthen us, but we are to use our faith in ways, which will bring glory to the Kingdom of God.

In Matthew's Gospel we read of a situation where Jesus' disciples could not deliver a young boy from a demon spirit. Jesus called His disciples faithless and perverse. He only gave one reason the boy had not been delivered. It wasn't because of the parent's sins, and it wasn't because of the boy's sins. No! It was because of the disciple's unbelief; it was because of their weak faith. The disciples had not really had to test their faith thus far, and as a result they had weak faith. The same is true for us today; too many of us today are afraid to try and really test our faith. We want to keep our faith to ourselves in a jar and store it on a shelf somewhere, just to pull it down and look at from time to time. We want to play it safe and secure. How do we play it safe? We do this by not using our faith and relying on someone else's faith to get the job done.

Yes, Scripture tells us we are to pray unceasingly, but what I'm talking about here is individuals, who claim to be God fearing Christians, yet rely solely on the prayers and faith of others, rather than exercise their own faith.

Again, every one of us is given a measure of faith; we are all given the same amount of faith. Jesus uses as His example, a mustard seeds. Mustard seeds are believed to have been the smallest seeds, but they produced some pretty large trees, which were large enough for birds to come and take refuge in its branches. According to the Jewish encyclopedia, original mustard trees, ones Jesus spoke of, are actually extinct now.

In order to grow anything from seed, any seed, it must first be planted; just like the seed of faith, which God planted in each one of us. According to a diagram printed in a Jewish encyclopedia, mustard seeds were customarily planted in small holes six inches deep and then filled with water. Amazingly 72 hours later the water was gone; silt already covered the seed and tiny green sprouts already begin to appear.

Most seeds take a lot longer to germinate than the mustard seed. We too should start growing as soon as possible. As soon as we place our lives in God's hands we should start growing.

The most important part of any plant is its roots. The roots are what hold the plant upright. The roots hold the plant securely in the ground, and it is the main source of nutrients for the plant. The root of the mustard plant grew three times faster than the stalk. Not only did the root grow faster it went deep, real deep. Mustard trees were recorded to have grown to a maximum height of 21 feet tall, with a tap root 63 feet in the ground, straight down. Notice the root or foundation of the tree is three times the size of the stalk? This tree was not to be moved. I guess you could say Mustard trees became trees with a solid destiny. While the tree is only 21 feet tall full grown, its branches were recorded at 72 feet full grown.

Our faith too needs to grow. We are to be rooted in Christ. Not just surface roots, but deeply rooted. Rooted so that we can withstand any trials and tribulations which come our way. If our faith is not deeply rooted then we tend to wither away.

Some do this by hiding in their own little world except at church on Sunday. They do this so as not to test their faith, and after all, if you don't do much for God then you have little to lose, much like the squirrel that would not take the chance and jump from one branch to another and leave his tree.

Faith, like I already mentioned for the children, is similar to the muscles of our bodies. We all have the same number of muscles, approximately 635, depending on who you talk to, but one thing is sure, if you don't use them they will not grow. The same goes for the measure of faith God gave each one of us. If we do not use our faith it will not grow. God does not expect us to keep our faith as a seed. God wants and I believe expects us to take the seed He planted and cause it to grow through our use.

Our faith, like that of the mustard tree, needs to spread out for others, three times as much as for ourselves. Under the Mustard tree's 72 foot limbs, nothing would grow; no insects, weeds, birds and other animals would lodge in the branches.

Our faith should not be influenced by the world, but instead our faith should be the influence in world, strong enough to destroy the influence of the world.

When we use our faith we are to use it more for others than ourselves. What! You want me to step out on faith for someone else before me? That's not going to happen! As Christians we are called to serve others, and to serve effectively we need to expand our area of service from just ourselves to those around us. We should develop our faith to the point where we have the ability to encompass those in need. Are you seen as a person of faith? Does the world see you as someone they can count on?

There is a story of the soldier during WWI who asked his commanding officer if he might go out into the "No Man's Land" between the trenches to bring in one of his comrades who lay fatally wounded. "You can go," said the officer, "but it's not worth it. Your friend is probably dead, and you will be throwing your own life away." But the man went. Somehow he managed to get to his friend, hoist him onto his shoulder, and bring him back to the trenches.

The two of them tumbled in together and lay in the trench bottom. The officer looked very tenderly on the would-be rescuer, and then he said, "I told you it wouldn't be worth it. Your friend is dead and now you are mortally wounded." "It was worth it sir," he said. "How do you mean, worth it?" "I tell you your friend is dead." "Yes, sir," the boy answered," but it was worth it, because when I got to him he was still alive, and he said to me, 'Jim, I knew you'd come.'"

Each of us has faith, but are we using it just for ourselves or are we using it for others. How long have you been saved? Has your faith continued to grow into a far reaching impact Christ wanted it too? Do people expect and count on you, or are you an after thought? Are you ready for a change?

These transformations in our faith will never come if we do not use our faith, more importantly, live out our faith. The challenge facing us today is the God given challenge to use our faith. Jesus did not point out little things the use of faith could accomplish. He used examples like mountains being moved and trees being ripped up and thrown in the sea.

God is tired of our little faith and He is ready for us to shoot for the heavens. Are you content living with your small faith? Isn't it about time you take the chance and jump from your safe and secure tree to another one all for serving God? Isn't it time we all get squirrely for God and jump out on faith?