

Mustard Faith

Tim Dubberly, March 20, 2004

Text: Matthew 17:14-21

Introduction:

Have you ever thought about your faith being a living, growing thing? Did you know that God has a destination for your faith? There is a kind of faith that God hates, and there is a kind of faith that God loves. Each of us has been given a measure of faith, and we must realize what we have done with it.

Matthew's gospel holds a story of a situation where Jesus' disciples could not deliver a young boy from a demon spirit. Jesus called them faithless and perverse. He only gave one reason the boy had not been delivered. It was not because of his parent's sins, or the boy's sins, but because of their unbelief. Then Christ describes the kind of faith that they will need and the only way to help develop this kind of faith is through prayer and fasting.

The problem with too many of us today is that we are afraid to try our faith. We try to play it safe and secure with someone else's faith.

■ When I was a young writer with a very uncertain income, I went into a quiet park to contemplate a serious problem. For four years I had been engaged but didn't dare to marry. There was no way of foreseeing how little I might earn in the next year; moreover, we had long cherished a plan of living and writing in Paris, Rome, Vienna, London-- everywhere. But how could we go three thousand miles away from everything that was familiar and secure, without the certainty of some money now and then?

At that moment I looked up and saw a squirrel jump from one high tree to another. He appeared to be aiming for a limb so far out of reach that the leap looked like suicide. He missed--but landed, safe and unconcerned, on a branch several feet lower. Then he climbed to his goal, and all was well. An old man sitting on the bench said, "Funny, I've seen hundreds of 'em jump like that, especially when there are dogs around and they can't come down to the ground. A lot of 'em miss, but I've never seen any hurt in trying." Then he chuckled. "I guess they've got to risk it if they don't want to spend their lives in one tree." I thought, A squirrel takes a chance--have I less nerve than a squirrel? We were married in two weeks, scraped up enough money for our passage and sailed across the Atlantic--jumping off into space, not sure what branch we'd land on. I began to write twice as fast and twice as hard as ever before. And to our amazement we promptly soared into the realm of respectable incomes. Since then, whenever I have to choose between risking a new venture or hanging back, those five little words run through my thoughts: "Once there was a squirrel --" And sometimes I hear the old man on the park bench saying, "They've got to risk it if they don't want to spend their lives in one tree."

--James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) pp. 128-129.

We must shoot higher than we need to go so that if we miss we will still be higher than where we are. Do not be afraid to trust God with your life's decisions.

Here is our faith revealed in the mustard tree. Notice these powerful "transformations".

I. Faith begins as a grain (20a).

A. Everyone's faith begins small.

- Every man is given a measure of faith.
- Mustard seeds are the smallest, even though mustard trees are actually extinct now, according to the Jewish encyclopedia.

B. That seed you have must be planted.

- According to a diagram printed in an 1896 edition of a Jewish encyclopedia, mustard seeds were planted in holes six inches deep and filled with water.
- 72 hours later the water was gone; silt covered the seed and tiny green sprouts begin to appear.

C. Newborns have power with God.

- That seed grows into an herb, which at that size is already greater than any other herb.
- A newborn's faith is greater than any medicine, governmental program, or source to solve a problem or handle a situation.

■ Who shoots at the midday sun, though he be sure he shall never hit the mark, yet as sure he is he shall shoot higher than he who aims at a bush.

Sir Philip Sidney

--James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) p. 40.

All information regarding mustard seed was gained from a tape of Brother Pylant- River of Life UPC, 1879 Carson Rd. no. P.O. Box 471 Fultondale al 35068-Sunday, 9/12/03-

II. The Grain turns into a plant.

Mark 4:31 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: ³²But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.

A. It is greater than all herbs.

- Our faith should never be smaller than the day we are born again.
- Do not discourage young Christians from using their faith to move mountains.

B. Faith must be well rooted.

- The root of the mustard plant grows three times faster than the stalk.
- Our faith must become rooted in God without seeing, according to Christ's example, at least three times as much as what we can see

■ Sweeping across Germany at the end of World War II, Allied forces searched farms and houses looking for snipers. At one abandoned house, almost a heap of rubble, searchers with flashlights found their way to the basement. There, on the crumbling wall, a victim of the Holocaust had scratched a Star of David. And beneath it, in rough lettering, the message:

I believe in the sun--even when it does not shine;
I believe in love--even when it is not shown;
I believe in God--even when he does not speak
Robert Schuller

--James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) p. 186.

C. Herb faith is not a tree but it is still growing.

- Faith is designed by God to grow, but God hates little faith.
- Faith can only grow by continual use and expansion of vision, which believes God for greater and greater things.

III. The plant turns into a tree.

Matthew 13:31 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:*
³² *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.*

A. Our herb faith must become tree faith.

- Mustard trees grow to a maximum height of 21 feet tall, which means the root is 63 feet in the ground, straight down.
- It becomes a tree with a destiny.

B. The branches of our faith must reach out to help others.

- While the tree is only 21 feet full grown, it's branches are 72 feet full grown.
- Our faith needs to spread out for others over three times as much as for ourselves according to this example.

■ One could not but be moved by the story of the soldier who asked his officer if he might go out into the "No Man's Land" between the trenches in World War I to bring in one of his comrades who lay grievously wounded. "You can go," said the officer, "but it's not worth it. Your friend is probably killed, and you will throw 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 you are mortally wounded." "It was worth it, though, 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.'"

--James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) p. 226.

C. Our faith is not seasonal.

- The mustard tree is an evergreen; it does not shed its leaves, nor do they fade.
- Our faith is not something that is used once in a while; like vision, we use it everyday, and we walk by faith and not by sight.

IV. The Mustard tree continues to grow into a great tree.

Luke 13: ¹⁹ It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.

A. Tree faith is attractive.

- Sheep love the fragrance that the tree and will come and shade under it.
- Its leaves close at night and open during the day, and the water that drips from the leaves of the tree will kill ticks, fleas, parasites, and body lice on the sheep without damaging the wool.
- Goats hate the fragrance, which irritates the membranes in their nose and some have committed suicide by butting the tree till they died.

B. Tree faith has a powerful influence.

- Under its 75 foot limbs, nothing will grow; no insects, weeds, even birds will lodge in the branches but will not nest because the influence of the tree will kill the eggs.
- Our faith should not be influence by the world, but it should be the influence in this world to destroy the influence of this world.

C. Tree faith is resilient.

- The mustard tree has been reported to survive a three and one-half year drought.
- Our faith should not depend on seeing God move all the time, but it should depend upon our trust in Him.

D. Tree faith should only be influence by one thing.

- Only one thing will grow close to a mustard tree; the Rose of Sharon, which puts out a flower that is white with a deep crimson heart.

(Jesus said He was the Rose of Sharon)

Song of Solomon 2:¹ I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. ² As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

- The mustard tree puts out solid white blooms; however, when a Rose of Sharon grows near a mustard tree, the

bloom of the mustard tree will change and the heart of its flower will turn first pink and then deep crimson red.

Conclusion:

Matthew's introduction of the seed of the fig tree gives us an insight into the comparison Christ made with His desire for our faith. He rebuked little faith and applauded and rewarded great faith.

Each of us has faith, but are we using it. How long have you been saved and has your faith continued to grow into the far-reaching impact Christ wanted it too?

These "transformations" in our faith will never come if we do not use our faith and live out our faith.

■ The drought of the past winter threatened the crop in a village of Crete. The priest told his flock: "There isn't anything that will save us, except a special litany for rain. Go to your homes, fast during the week, believe and come on Sunday for the litany of rain." The villagers heard him, fasted during the week and went to the church on Sunday morning, but as soon as the priest saw them, he was furious. He said, "Go away, I will not do the litany. You do not believe." "But Father," they protested, "we fasted and we believe." "Believe? And where are your umbrellas?"

--James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) p. 188.

The challenge facing us today is the use of our faith. God did not point out little things to believer for. He used things like mountains being removed and trees being removed and planted in the sea. God is tired of your little faith and He is ready for you to shoot for the sun.

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