

The Faith That Moves Mountains

Faith Illustrated In the Book of Matthew

Faith means I believe God will do what He has promised to do in the New Covenant. It means as I walk with Him and seek first His Kingdom and righteousness, He will be true to His promises. The New Testament is the documents of the New Covenant. In this covenant God lays out our part clearly and He also makes astounding promises to us. ***Faith means we believe Him and we take action.*** Faith means we're absolutely convinced of the reality of things that we don't see. It means that we not only believe that God exists, but that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. These stories from the Book of Matthew illustrate well this kind of faith.

This study is a series of 9 stories from the Book of Matthew – there are many more. **Now, remember, these stories were inspired by the Holy Spirit in order to change, to shape, to mold and to transform the worldview of His people.** They are to shape the way we see and understand God and the world we live in. My prayer is that this study would do just that. May the Holy Spirit teach us through His Word.

Let's ask God to teach us with these great stories –

PRAY

1. Matthew 8:5-13

- 5 And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him,
- 6 and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented."
- 7 Jesus *said to him, "I will come and heal him."
- 8 But the centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed."
- 9 "For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it."
- 10 Now when Jesus heard *this*, He marveled and said to those who were following, "***Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel.***
- 11 "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline *at the table* with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven;
- 12 but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."
- 13 And Jesus said to the centurion, "***Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed.***" And the servant was healed that *very* moment.

What do we learn here about faith?

Note: “faith” and “belief” are the same word in the Greek. They’re translated with different words in English, but in the original language of the New Testament it’s the very same thing.

Note: it’s helpful to point out that you can find great faith in unlikely places - that’s encouraging to missionaries.

Note: almost never does anyone say “the obvious lesson is that it is done for the man as he believed.” I have no idea why. I’m always amazed at how when I teach this to Americans for the first time, the clear obvious teaching of the story is almost never mentioned. The bold italics of course are mine, but in spite of the effort to point it out, it’s never clear to people until I point it out. And then sometimes there’s nervous laughter. At the end, we’re all products of our culture, and to some extent the secular, materialistic (in the sense of empirical) western culture has influenced our view of God and Scripture.

2. Matthew 8:23–27 (NASB95)

- 23 When He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him.
- 24 And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep.
- 25 And they came to *Him* and woke Him, saying, “Save *us*, Lord; we are perishing!”
- 26 He *said to them, “**Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?**” Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm.
- 27 The men were amazed, and said, “What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?”

Were the disciples in real peril? Was it a dangerous situation? Did fisherman die on the Sea of Galilee? (Yes, yes, and yes they did. It was real danger. Fishermen lost their lives on the Sea of Galilee.)

What do you learn about faith?

Note: Jesus expects faith even under incredibly dangerous, stressful situations. Please note He **doesn’t** say, “Wow guys, this is terrible! You poor fellows! Calm down, relax; I know this is a horrible trial. You’ve had a long day; you’ve been working hard. Why don’t you just let Me take care of this.” Nope – He still expects faith and it’s byproduct: courage.

3. Matthew 9:19–22 (NASB95)

- 19 Jesus got up and *began* to follow him, and *so did* His disciples.

- 20 And a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years, came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak;
- 21 for she was saying to herself, "If I only touch His garment, I will get well."
- 22 But Jesus turning and seeing her said, "***Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well.***" At once the woman was made well.

What do you learn about faith?

Note: Hopefully, the students are starting to catch on that the key here is faith. Her faith has made her well. Jesus doesn't mention anything about a grand plan from before the beginning of time to heal her for God's glory. He tells her straight up: "your faith has made you well."

I believe that many of these stories are purposely short so that they can be easily reproduced, but also so that we can't miss the point.

Was there anything you found difficult about this story? Anything that seemed sort of strange?

Note: The woman was healed because of faith, not because of sound doctrine. Did Jesus' clothes have magical healing powers? No. Of course they didn't. (Although this type of thing happened two other times in the New Testament.) Solid faith can even trump bad doctrine. God blesses and responds to faith, and He'll overlook doctrinal confusion to do it. Does He want the lady to know the truth, to have good doctrine? Absolutely, but He'll work through faith in spite of doctrine.

4. Matthew 9:27-29

- 27 As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!"
- 28 When He entered the house, the blind men came up to Him, and Jesus *said to them, "**Do you believe that I am able to do this?**" They *said to Him, "Yes, Lord."
- 29 Then He touched their eyes, saying, "***It shall be done to you according to your faith.***"

What do you learn about faith?

Okay so 3 of the 4 stories have made exactly the same point about faith. Surely this is something God wants us to understand. And it has some amazing implications...

Is it done to you according to your wealth?

- According to your education?
- Your family?
- Your job?
- Your social status?

- Your personality?
- Your looks?

Now, these things can all be great and can be leveraged for the Kingdom, but at the end of the day, it's done to us according to our faith.

5. Matthew 13:53–58 (NASB95) Jesus Revisits Nazareth

- 53 When Jesus had finished these parables, He departed from there.
 54 He came to His hometown and *began* teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, “Where *did* this man *get* this wisdom and *these* miraculous powers?
 55 “Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?
 56 “And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then *did* this man *get* all these things?”
 57 And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his *own* household.”
 58 ***And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.***

This passage has some great teachings in it; what does it teach about faith?

Do you think unbelief affects what Jesus does in your life and in this country?

Optional: What should you do about it?

6. Matthew 14:22–33 (NASB95) Jesus Walks on the Water

- 22 Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of *Him* to the other side, while He sent the crowds away.
 23 After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.
 24 But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary.
 25 And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea.
 26 When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear.
 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “***Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.***”
 28 Peter said to Him, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.”
 29 And He said, “Come!” And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus.
 30 But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”

- 31 Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and *said to him, "**You of little faith, why did you doubt?**"
- 32 When they got into the boat, the wind stopped.
- 33 And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"

Tell me about Jesus' attitude towards Peter asking to get out of the boat?

NOTE: He likes it. He's good with it. He's for it. He doesn't say, "gosh Peter, stop the showboating. Don't be a showoff! Whaddaya trying to prove!???" He doesn't do that. He tells Peter emphatically to "Come!"

Tell me about Jesus' attitude toward Peter sinking?

He's disappointed. He's immediately helpful and pulls Peter up out of the water, but He's obviously not happy with his lack of faith.

What does this story teach you about faith?

Jesus would like us to get out of the boat! Jesus would love to see us walk on water by faith. He doesn't rebuke the others for staying in the boat. But you can see He'd like nothing more than to go for a walk on the Sea of Galilee in the storm with Peter. And I'm convinced He'd like to do the same with all of us.

7. Matthew 15:21–28 (NASB95) *The Syrophenician Woman*

- 21 Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon.
- 22 And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and *began* to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed."
- 23 But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us."
- 24 But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."
- 25 But she came and *began* to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!"
- 26 And He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."
- 27 But she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."
- 28 Then Jesus said to her, "**O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish.**" And her daughter was healed at once.

What do you admire about this woman?

Notes: describe the gravity of the situation. Could anything be much worse than a demon-possessed daughter? Cruelly possessed? Think about it. Try to imagine it. You come home every night from work and ask your wife, "how was your day?" She says, "Well, the demon was cruel all day long." How do you even go to work? How can life not be horrible all the time?

So she's got a terrible problem and she comes to Jesus and His disciples.

Yet, she's rejected 4 times:

1. Vs. 23 "He did not answer her a word." Ever prayed and felt like God is not answering? I have.
2. Vs. 23. The disciples say, "Send her away." Ever been mistreated by Church leaders? This is not their best moment. This lady is in a bad way and they don't show much compassion – perhaps because she was a foreigner.
3. Vs. 24. Then Jesus gives a theological pretext for not answering prayer. Was this true? Obviously not, our first story was Jesus healing the servant of a Roman centurion. (It seems like a lot of what you read about prayer is an explanation of why God does NOT answer.)

What would you do now? Would you let it go? This lady does not. She bows before Him and begs vs. 25. She's awesome!

Surely, this will move the compassionate heart of Jesus. What does He do?

4. Vs 26. He calls her a dog!

Some like to say "puppy". I don't know about that. The Jews thought non - Jews were dogs and I don't think she thought, "How nice! He's calling me a puppy!" But in any case - what an incredible response! "Okay, I'm a dog, but I'm **your** dog (You're my Master) and just the crumbs will get the job done. " You gotta love this lady!

Do you think God puts your faith to the test?

What do the tests look like?

8. Matthew 17:14–20 (NASB95) *The Demonic*

- 14 When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying,
- 15 "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water.
- 16 "I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him."

- 17 And Jesus answered and said, “***You unbelieving and perverted generation,*** how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me.”
- 18 And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once.
- 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not drive it out?”
- 20 And He *said to them, “***Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to 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 to you.***

Why couldn't the disciples cast out the demon?

Too little faith.

What does Jesus think about that? He's not happy with it. He's tired of putting up with it. He calls them unbelieving perverts.

Why does Jesus call them “unbelieving and perverted”?

Notes: Perverted in Greek means to twist or distort. Unbelief is a perversion, a distortion; a twisting of the life God wants us to live.

Had they cast out demons before? Yes, they had. Did they have faith? Sure they did. Enough to leave everything behind to follow Jesus. They had preached, served, cast out demons and healed the sick. They were not bad Christians or bad guys. But they needed more faith.

He calls this perverted because He wants us to walk by faith, not by sight.

What does this teach you about faith?

Jesus wants us to overcome obstacles by faith. He wants us to be filled with faith, and for us to ***NOT*** live that way, but rather to live in defeat, fear, anxiety, worry and pessimism is NOT the life He wants for us. It's a distortion, a perversion. Our Father loves us and wants us to be “overcomers”, “mountain movers” a people who believe Him and His Word. A people who can see mountains move, who can tackle impossible challenges and who, by faith, see God do great things.

Note: I think at some point people are wondering about a question and I'd like to answer it: “do you mean to say that I wouldn't be in such and such a terrible, tragic problem if I had more faith?” That's a fair question and it's going to come up. I like to give the examples of Jenny Smith, who is confined to a wheelchair, and Caitlin Maier. She and her husband want to go the field. One challenge they're working with is that Joseph suffers terrible chronic pain that doesn't allow him to even sleep at night. After many sleepless days, his body will shut down and go into a coma like

state. They both asked if I was saying that they lacked faith. So we need to stress that Jesus does NOT condemn the father of the boy, but rather an entire generation and specifically the religious leaders, that is, the Apostles. So I cannot condemn Jenny or Caitlin without condemning myself first because I am a leader in this agency.

Look what "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? let him **call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him**, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."—Jas. 5: 13-16.

Who's praying the prayer of faith? The elders, the leaders, don't beat people up with this stuff. Because...

I must grow in faith. In fact, in the Mark passage the boys' father says "I do believe, help my unbelief." That's where we all are – we do believe but there is doubt in our hearts. May Jesus help our unbelief.

So please: Don't use this teaching to hammer or condemn individuals for a lack of faith. Jesus does not do that. Jesus calls all the people to have more faith, to grow in faith. Use the teaching the way Jesus does. If you're a leader, take responsibility to grow in faith and to help those you lead to grow in faith.

9. Matthew 21:18-22 (NASB95) *The Barren Fig Tree*

- 18** Now in the morning, when He was returning to the city, He became hungry.
19 Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He *said to it, "No longer shall there ever be *any* fruit from you." And at once the fig tree withered.
20 Seeing *this*, the disciples were amazed and asked, "How did the fig tree wither *all* at once?"
21 And Jesus answered and said to them, "***Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen.***
22 ***"And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."***

What does this teach us about faith?

What does it teach us about prayer?

Note: Jesus miraculously withers a fig tree and the disciples marvel and ask Him about it. I think it's important to note what Jesus does **NOT** say. He does NOT say,

"Well, you know I'm Jesus, I can do this stuff. I want you all to believe in Me." Now, that's true and He could have said it, but He doesn't!

He rather turns it into an opportunity to tell THEM that ***they can also do these amazing things*** and then broadens the application to include their prayer lives. This is amazing! The 9 stories build to the conclusions of the last two. It definitely is about showing who Jesus is and what He is like, but He goes beyond that and calls us to see mountain move as well. In fact, if we have faith like what He's talking about, that's what we ***will*** be doing. So we say, "we do believe Lord, help our unbelief!"

Conclusion:

Why do you suppose there's so many of these faith stories in this Gospel?

Note: They must be very important. Any idea that the Holy Spirit stresses this much must indeed be a very essential idea.

How should this impact the way you make disciples?

Note: Our disciples need a steady diet of faith building stories and teachings. That's what the Holy Spirit did. That's what Matthew, Mark and Luke all did. Matthew has more of these stories, Mark has 12 of them, Luke has 14 of them. There are many more faith building stories, I've picked these because they explicitly use the word "faith".

Conclusion: God calls us to grow in so many areas. Paul calls this "the upward call of God in Christ Jesus". Here are some amazingly difficult areas in which I must grow...

- To grow in love: "you shall love your neighbor as yourself."
- To grow in compassion: "whatever you did to the least of these, you did for Me."
- To grow in generosity: "Sell all your possessions and give to the poor."
- To imitate God: "Be imitators of God."
- To walk as Jesus did: "Whoever claims to live in Him, must walk as Jesus did."

I need to grow in all these areas and I'll be pursuing these until I die. So then, ***is it inconceivable that He would call all of us to grow in faith?*** Of course not! Let's grow in faith.