

## No Small Thing

I watched a video on Linked-in this past week, which I normally do not do, but this was of a red neck lad who was giving a 2-minute lesson on Matthew 14:25-31. We will get to that in a little bit. I take these folks with a grain of salt as I really do not understand today's generation. I scratch my head when folks profess the Bible and discard the Old Testament, if they read it, they would not pierce and tattoo themselves per Exodus 21:2, 6 and Leviticus 19:27-28. However, the Blood of Jesus washed everything clean anyway...forgive me, ink and staples in your face does not seem like fashion.

But this brief video started the wheels turning and the mustard seed and faith came to mind.

**Matthew 17:20-** “And Jesus said to them, “Because of your unbelief. For truly I say to you, if you have faith as a *tiny* mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, ‘Remove from here,’ and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you.”

**Luke 17:6-** “But the Lord said, “If you had faith as a tiny mustard seed, you might say to this sycamine tree, ‘Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”

Mustard seeds are mentioned in scripture several times but the two listed above are tied to faith. It is along these lines we will focus our theme this week.

For curiosity’s sake, just how big are mustard seeds? Well, not very big. If you try and track down a size on line, you will come up with an average of between one and two millimeters. And if you are old school like me (what the heck is a millimeter) well, it is about as thick as an ATM/credit card. Now I know everyone knows what they are. Other descriptions are the head of a pin or a pencil point. That is pretty small. One would equate that as “not much faith” by size.

Their trees can grow anywhere from 9 to 30 feet depending on which type of mustard seed. The Kingdom of Heaven is also compared to a mustard seed when it grows into a tree.

**Matthew 13:31-32-** “Another parable He presented to them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is compared to a *tiny* mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; Which indeed is very small among all the seeds; but after it is

grown, it is greater than all the herbs, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of heaven come and roost in its branches.”

So, if we have faith only the size of that tiny mustard seed and we can move mountains and uproot trees, shouldn't we be at least able to move a pencil across a table? What is it that is holding us back? Could it be our faith? Let us take a brief look at some of the Old Testament Heroes of faith to see if there is something they displayed maybe we are missing.

## **Noah**

We know that Noah was 500 years old when his sons were born. That in itself is amazing.

**Genesis 5:32-** “And Noah was five hundred years old, and Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth.”

God called upon Noah to build the Ark and told him of the coming flood (**Genesis 6:13-22**).

Noah was 600 years old when the flood began.

**Genesis 7:6-** “And Noah *was* six hundred years old when the flood of waters began upon the earth.”

Now the Bible does not say exactly what year Noah began to build the Ark but we can guess it was between his ages of 500 and 600, so he labored between 50 and 100 years. How much ridicule do you think he endured while building the Ark? I wonder how many people were pounding on the door when the rains came? I will bet when the sky cracks and the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet sounds the same expressions will be on the faces of those standing in awe.

We know the flood prevailed for **150 days** before the Ark came to rest.

**Genesis 8:3-4-** “And the waters receded from off the earth continually, and at the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters had gone down. And in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat.”

That is a *long time* to devote one's self to a cause without seeing the One Who gave you the blueprints for a ship with no water. The Ark, by the way, was 450' long, 75' high, and 45' wide. Not bad for 600-year-old man and his kids who were probably 100 years old as well.

**Abraham**

When Abram was 99 years old, he walked with God and God established His covenant with him and called him Abraham. God told Abraham he would be the father of many nations. (**Genesis 17:1-5**).

**Genesis 21:2**- “For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.”

Abraham had waited 100 years to have a son with his wife and finally he is blessed with Isaac. God puts him to an incredible test by offering Isaac as a sacrifice.

**Genesis 22:1-2**- “And it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” And He said, “Take now your son, your only *son* Isaac, whom you love, and go into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell you.”

Here is a man, who has a covenant with God and has waited 100 years for a son and now he has been told to offer him for a sacrifice. Abraham’s faith is so strong, he knows that God will deliver him or raise him from the dead if He so desires.

**Genesis 22:7-12-** “And Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father.” And he said, “Here I *am*, my son.” And he said, “Behold the fire and the wood. But where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” And Abraham said, “My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering.” So they both went on together. And they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. And he bound his son Isaac and laid him on the wood, upon the altar. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the LORD called to him from the heavens and said, “Abraham! Abraham!” And he said, “Here I *am*.” And He said, “Do not lay your hand upon the lad, nor do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.”

*How much faith* did Abraham display when he raised the knife to slay his son Isaac? I cannot imagine how big of a mustard seed that could be?

**Joseph**

**Genesis 37:2-** “This *is* the account *of the family* of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, came tending the flock with his brothers. And he was a youth with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives. And Joseph brought to his father an evil report of them.”

This poor lad was hated by his own brothers for being virtuous. They sold him into slavery rather than kill him outright and staged a fake animal attack to lie to their father that he had been killed by a wild animal.

**Genesis 37:27-28-** “Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he *is* our brother, and our flesh.” And his brothers hearkened.

Then Midianite traders passed by, and they drew up Joseph and took him out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty *pieces* of silver. And they brought Joseph into Egypt.”

The plan ultimately backfired as do most when God has His plans for someone and their faith is unwavering. To fast forward through Joseph’s life he eventually became second in command over all of Egypt.

**Genesis 41:39-44-** “And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all this, no one *is* as discreet and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall obey your word. Only in the throne will I be greater than you.” And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.” And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand and put it upon Joseph’s hand. And he dressed him with fine linen robes, and put a gold chain around his neck. And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had, and they proclaimed before him, “Bow the knee!” And he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I *am* Pharaoh, and without *a word* from you, no man shall lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.”

He maintained his faith in God and was delivered from his bondage after nearly 13 years. Joseph was wrongfully sold and imprisoned yet did not hold any grudges against his brothers. He forgave them as he was used to preserve their lives during the famine.

**Moses**



I think it only fair to mention Moses as well as he was 80 years old when he began his work to convince Pharaoh to let the Nation of Israel go. All the plagues, parting the Red Sea, receiving the 10 Commandments, and wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, he kept his faith in God.

**Exodus 7:7-** “And Moses *was* eighty years old, and Aaron *was* eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh.”

Even after all that Moses did, he was not able to cross over into the promised land for disobeying God’s instructions by “striking” the rock instead of “speaking” to the rock.

**Numbers 20:11-12-** “And Moses lifted up his hand and with his rod he struck the rock twice. And the water came out plentifully, and the congregation and their animals drank. And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.”

**Deuteronomy 34:4-5-** “And the LORD said to him, “This *is* the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your seed.’ I have caused you to see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there.” And

Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD.”

Okay, so what in the blazes do any of these people have to do with mustard seeds? It should be fairly obvious by now. We are establishing a level of faith. Just how much faith we will determine in just a little bit. Remember, it only takes the amount of faith as big as a pencil point or as thick as a credit card to move a mountain, right? Jesus Christ said it so it must be true as He cannot lie.

**Titus 1:2-** “In *the* hope of eternal life, which God Who cannot lie promised before the ages of time,”

If faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains, just how big was the faith of these Old Testament figures who seemed to have accomplished the impossible? Building an Ark, raising a knife, enduring wrongful imprisonment, and delivering a nation over decades would take an incredible amount of faith and devotion. I believe everyone would agree with that. Most of us have difficulty maintaining sanity driving in Naples’ traffic during season.

Did a lot change in the centuries between the events of the Old Testament and the time of Jesus Christ's Ministry? Perhaps the commerce, the trade and maybe even transportation to a point. I am sure the cultures had developed and expanded as we have learned from history. But human nature pretty much has remained the same. Evil is still evil.

In looking at the Disciples in the New Testament, Jesus rebukes them on several occasions of having "little" faith. Why would He tell them they have "little faith?"

**Matthew 6:30-34-** "Now if God so arrays the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, *shall* He not much rather clothe you, O *you* of *little* faith? Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'With what shall we be clothed?' For the nations seek after all these things. And your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things. But *as for* you, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow; for tomorrow shall take care of the *things* of itself. Sufficient for the day *is* the evil of that *day*." (Also, Luke 12:26-30)

**Matthew 8:23-27-** “And when He entered into the ship, His disciples followed Him. Now a great tempest suddenly arose in the sea, so great that the ship was being covered by the waves; but He was sleeping. And His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, “Lord, save us! We are perishing.” And He said to them, “Why are you afraid, O *you* of *little* faith?” Then He arose *and* rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. But the men were amazed, saying, “What kind of *Man* is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?”

This is the scripture I mentioned in the beginning of the lesson. This is what really got me thinking on this. How could the disciples have “little faith.”

**Matthew 14:25-31-** “Now in *the* fourth watch of the night, Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled and said, “It is an apparition!” And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Be of good courage; *it* is I. Do not be afraid.” Then Peter answered Him *and* said, “Lord, if it is You, bid me to come to You upon the waters.” And He said, “Come.” And after climbing down from the ship, Peter walked upon the waters to go to Jesus. But when he saw *how* strong the wind *was*, he became afraid; and *as he* was beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, “Lord, save me!” And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, “O *you* of *little* faith, why did you *doubt*?”

**Matthew 16:6-12-** “And Jesus said to them, “Watch out, and be on guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then they reasoned among themselves, saying, “*It is* because we did not take bread.” But when Jesus knew *this*, He said to them, “O *you* of ***little*** faith, why are you reasoning among yourselves that *it is* because you did not bring bread? Do you still not understand? *Do you* not remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you took *up*? Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets you took *up*? How is it that you do not understand that I was not speaking of bread *when I told* you to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees?” Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

You know me and my partiality towards definitions. Well, the word “little” was the hang up that was mentioned in that two-minute video that stuck in my mind.

We always think of “little” as being small or diminutive in size or stature. It is the most common reference and probably why we may tend to overlook any other meaning.

We in our nation have always put too much emphasis on size, bigger is always better, bigger houses, bigger cars, etc. Bigger is not always better and little is not

always less. Look at how small the atom is. Look what happens when we split one.

Bad things can happen. We can really lose sight of what is truly important.

Anyway, little for our lesson does not necessarily mean small.

I actually found this definition on the Collins Dictionary website and (also on the Meriam-Webster's Dictionary website as well). I had to scroll down a bit and see the many uses of the word, "little."

Definition of "little"- on the fifth list of adjectives:

1. small in size; not big, large, or great (which we all know)
2. small in amount, number, or degree; not much
3. short in duration or distance; brief; not long

I have included the first two which deal with size and we mentioned but the third on the list really jumped out at me. "Short in duration." Wow! I hope the lightbulb is starting to flicker on the point of all this. It is not the so much the size of what we think our faith is, it is the duration or the endurance to which we sustain it.

How often do we face the enemy with all of our armor all shined up and our sword sharpened and as soon as the first contact is made, we drop our shield and lose the faith? We run for the cave like Ezekiel? How long do you last in traffic before the

“colorful” language flows when someone cuts you off? A pity our faith does not have timer on it.

Do you think Peter might have taken his eyes off of Jesus just for a moment and realized, “hey dummy, you just stepped out of a perfectly good boat onto open water at night during a storm...” Bang! Down he goes! It is the same thing for us when we take our eyes off of Jesus Christ. Our faith must have endurance! It must be a lasting faith!

**Mark 13:13-** “And you shall be hated by all men for My name’s sake; but the one who endures to the end, that one shall be saved.”

**Matthew 13:18-23-** “Therefore, hear the parable of the Sower: When anyone hears the Word of the kingdom and does not understand *it*, the wicked one comes and snatches away that which was sown in his heart. This is the one who was sown by the way. Now the one who was sown upon the rocky places is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy; But *because* he has no root in himself, he does not endure; for when tribulation or persecution arises because of the Word, he is quickly offended. And the one who was sown among the thorns is the one who hears the Word, but the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of

*riches choke the Word*, and it becomes unfruitful. But the one who was sown on good ground, this is *the one who hears the Word and understands*, who indeed brings forth fruit and produces—one a hundredfold, another sixtyfold *and* another thirtyfold.”

Do we really think Peter and the other disciples had “small” faith? Probably not. What was it then that caused Peter to sink when he stepped out of the boat and walked toward Jesus? He *was* walking on the water! He *had* the faith to step out onto the water! It *was* at night! He *knew* it was water under his feet! Would that not have taken faith? *He took his eyes off of Christ* and let the things in the world around him, *distract* him. *The fear and doubt set in and crushed his faith*. Sound familiar?

The distractions of this world and everyday life will tend to pull us down and away from God’s calling and we know the enemy will continually thwart every effort we make in our walk toward God’s Kingdom. This is only done to distract or deter us in our faith in coming to that place of endurance God so desires for each of us. Our journey is not for the fainthearted.



**James 1:12-** “Blessed *is the* man who endures trials because, after he has been proved, he shall receive a crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

This is why it is vital for us to remember we have been called out of this world to be separate and set apart.

**John 15:19-** “If you were of the world, the world would love its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have personally chosen you out of the world, the world hates you for this.”

**2 Corinthians 6:17-** “Therefore, come out from the midst of them and be separate,” says *the* Lord, “and touch not *the* unclean, and I will receive you;”

This does not make us better but we need not be focused on the things “of” this world. Sure, do not have your head buried in the sand and we need the everyday things for life, absolutely, but as just read Matthew 6:30-34, God knows our every need and we are to seek Him and His righteousness first. We do not need to panic like the rest of the world does at every breaking news story.

**1 Peter 2:19-21-** “Because this is acceptable: if, for the sake of conscience toward God, *anyone* ***endures*** sorrows, suffering unjustly. For what commendation *is there* if, disobeying and being beaten, you endure it? But if *while* doing good you ***endure*** suffering, this is acceptable with God; For to this you were called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow in His footsteps.”

If we look at the demeanor of the disciples after Christ’s resurrection and their receiving God’s Holy Spirit, they were now emboldened. They witnessed Christ’s execution and crucifixion. Seeing their dead Friend come back to life and an empty tomb would sure light an unquenchable fire that would not end until their last breath. All save John would be killed for the cause. God’s Holy Spirit can light this same fire in us if we provide the right fuel.

If we compare some of their accomplishments after Christ’s resurrection, we can see that the disciples had a pocket full of mustard seeds. Their faith had definitely grown.

**Acts 9:40-** “But after putting everyone out, Peter fell to his knees and prayed.

Then, turning to the body, he said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes; and when she saw Peter, she sat up.”

How much of an overflow of faith and God’s Holy Spirit did Peter have when his shadow passed by and healed people?

**Acts 5:15-16-** “Insomuch that the people were bringing out the sick into the streets and putting them on beds and stretchers, so that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. And a multitude from the cities round about also came together to Jerusalem, bringing sick ones and those beset by unclean spirits; and they were all healed.”

That is why Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4, and Luke 4:4 is so critical. We must pay attention to every word, *every word*, no matter how big or small, and make sure we capture the intended use and context. We know how scripture is “cut and pasted” to fit the many narratives and agendas of various denominations. Even for those seeking the truth it can be easy to overlook so simple a meaning of a common word.

We want ALL of God's Word. We do not want to miss any of it, no not one syllable, to gain the full understanding of what the scripture says.

Jesus said we shall do the works He did and greater works than these as He has gone to the Father.

**John 14:12-** "Truly, truly I say to you, the one who believes in Me shall also do the works that I do; and greater works than these shall he do because I am going to the Father."

Jesus said this so it is possible. What must we do to grow to this level of service?

Keep our eyes on Jesus, work on our enduring faith, and step out of the boat.

Amen.

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