

Hurst Green
3rd Nov 19
Faith like a mustard seed
Matt 17:14-21

You all know the verse from our reading

Matthew 17:20 (ANIV)

²⁰ ~~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."*

Well that is our text for this morning because on holiday I heard a Tongan Methodist minister one Sunday preach on faith and he inferred, but did not expand, something that I think is very important and if I think it is important then I am going to tell you about it.

Then you can consider it or ignore it but you cannot say that you have not been told.

Now the mustard seed.

Some of you may have heard or read about this mustard seed saying such things as a mustard seed only produces small bushes and so scripture must be wrong. This is not so but accusers point to verses such as Mark.

Mark 4:31-32 (ANIV)

³¹ *It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground.* ³² *Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade."*

The problem is the critics have got themselves confused. Typically they have taken the mustard seed we use in cooking as their example as that grows on bushes and is picked and dried for our use. We don't often use them as seeds preferring to use pre-prepared mustard but they are small seeds but do not grow into the largest of garden plants

But there are many variations of mustard which we do not use for cooking such as the black mustard which do grow into trees that birds could nest in.

So once again our bibles are correct and it is the interpretations that have gone awry.

But back to faith

Now loads of accusations have been thrown around about faith. A typical one is that people don't get healed because you do not have enough faith; or the person who is sick does not have enough faith etc.

On that particular issue let me just say that people who say that are wrong. I have prayed for people for healing and a few of them have been healed – many more have not! I have the same faith every time I pray for healing but it doesn't always happen. I don't know why but God does and one day he may let me know but he hasn't yet!!

Now what does the bible say about faith?

We could wait while you dive into your concordances but we won't.

The bible **doesn't** say anything about building up your faith! Does that surprise you?

To counter that I need to point out to you that Jesus says something on this matter. Again he does not say anything about building up your faith but he does make the following comments:

- He refers to little faith in such passages as:
 - In the beatitudes about people worrying about what they will eat and wear in (Matt 6:30) appropriate perhaps for the next few weeks!!
 - When the storms blow he rebukes the disciples for having little faith (Mat 8:26)
 - He did not do many miracles in Nazareth because of **their** lack of faith (Matt 13:58 & Mk 6:6) which is an interesting angle on faith.
 - Peter walking on water and starting to sink was rebuked (Matt 14:31)
 - And other places you can look up for yourself.

And, again to counter my argument, he compliments the Centurion

Matthew 8:10 (ANIV)

¹⁰ *When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith."*

Or the Canaanite woman crying out for her daughter:

Matthew 15:28 (ANIV)

²⁸ *Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.*

But those are the only two examples and, interestingly, both are gentiles not Israelites!

So Jesus describes faith by the effect it has rather than the amount.

But if we have the faith of a mustard seed we can do great things!

And in other places he commends people for their faith healing people because of their faith or because of the faith of others.

The sick woman who had been bleeding for twelve years was healed because of her faith (Matt 9:22)

Or the paralytic lying on the mat was healed because of the faith of those who had brought him (Matt9:2)

But in those cases it is because of their faith and he makes no comments about great or little.

So those are the scriptures you could use to counter my arguments in today's talk.

But before you do consider the rest of this talk!

Firstly consider something else that Jesus says in:

Luke 17:5-6 (ANIV)

⁵ *The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"* ⁶ *He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.*

Now if we could or should increase our faith in some way this is the ideal opportunity for Jesus to tell us how and, you may have noticed, he is not short on telling us what we need to be doing but in this case he does not. He goes back to this basic image of the mustard seed.

He does not come up with some spiritual exercises that we need to do.

He does not tell us to pray for more faith or anything else.

He tells them you only need faith as small as a mustard seed and you will do amazing things. Many of his examples are about reforming the land mass by throwing mountains into the sea or, as in this case, planting trees in funny places and I don't suggest we take those literally.

But he makes the point that a little faith goes a long way!

So what do we need to do?

Again Jesus tells us the answer:

Matthew 21:21 (ANIV)

²¹ ~~Jesus replied,~~ *"I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig-tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done.*

Again he does not say "great faith" you simply have faith and you can be involved in this spiritual landscaping of our planet.

But did you notice the key that passage?

if you have faith and do not doubt

Here Jesus has hit the nail on the head for us for the enemy of faith is our old foe doubt.

If the devil can get us to doubt then we will be undermining our own faith and so will get nowhere.

And as we know doubt is also like a mustard seed. A little goes a long way but the wrong way!

We need to remove doubt from our faith – it is simple; if Jesus said it it is true and will come to pass. Like the problem with the mustard seeds earlier our interpretation may be wrong but what Jesus says is true.

So what of our faith and this mustard seed the bible keeps talking about.

I think greater understanding can be gained from considering another time Jesus talks about a mustard seed. That's when he is talking about the Kingdom of God

Matthew 13:31-32 (ANIV)

³¹ He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed. It starts small and grows into something really big. That is "it takes over". The Kingdom of Heaven is something that you let into your life and it will take over your life. Jesus and his salvation can and should be the most important thing to you because you have got to go and tell all men about it so that they can become disciples too.

But it grows – This set of Jesus' parables about the Kingdom of Heaven all refer to things that start small and grow. So you can't be given more of the Kingdom of Heaven because you already have all that you need – you just need to let it grow.

Your faith is going to be like that.

You have faith as small as a mustard seed and you start to act on that faith. And so your faith grows; as it grows you act on it more and so you see the results and you trust it more.

So you have faith like a mustard seed – good! You have all that you need.

You are in one of those categories referred to as having little faith? Then remove the doubt from your life.

Romans 10:9-10 (ANIV)

⁹ ~~That~~ if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Our faith is simple and so easy to believe and easy to confess.

And this view of our faith as a black and white thing – something you either have or do not have explains some other verses from the bible.

Jude says

Jude 1:20 (ANIV)

²⁰ But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.

This could once again be taken as seeing you need more faith and that there is some way to get this faith but that is not what it actually says.

It does not tell you to build up your faith but rather that you are to build yourself up **in your** faith.

Or in Revelation when talking to the Church at Thyatira

Revelation 2:19 (ANIV)

¹⁹ *I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.*

This does not say that those things are now bigger than they were before but simply that you are doing more - using them more than you did before.

And so do not consider your faith as something you need more of when the truth is that what you need is to be doing is more. You need to be using your faith. That will allow it to expand in your life and take over so that the influence your mustard seed of faith has will expand.

Go, take that mustard seed and let it become something really special.

