

INTRODUCTION

In the last message we talked about the miracle of the Transfiguration of Jesus that happened on the top of Mt. Tabor. In this message we'll look at what happened when Jesus came down from the mountain. In Raphael's famous Vatican painting, "The Transfiguration of Christ" he combines both events. While Jesus' glory was being revealed on top of the mountain, there was a demon-tormented young man down in the valley. Raphael attempted to capture the scene where the boy is actually having a seizure. His muscles are contracted, his head is thrown back, and his eyes are crossed. You can also see the desperation in the faces of the boy's parents. The nine disciples are attempting to help the boy, but as we will see, they were powerless to help him.

This passage contains both a miracle of deliverance and a parable about possibility.

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?'"

Jesus wasn't criticizing the parents; He was chiding the disciples, because in Matthew 10 He had given them authority to cast out demons in His name.

"'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. But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.'"

I'm not kidding about the title of this message. The word "impossible" really isn't in my personal dictionary. A number of years ago I read where Jesus said, "Nothing will be impossible for you" so I opened the old dictionary I've had since college and took an Xacto knife and cut out the words "impossible" and "impossibility." So what are the implications of that? I don't know the word "implication" either because it was on the other side of the page, and it got cut out too! Of course, like many of you I use an online dictionary now. I went to dictionary.com and tried to delete the word impossible from their site, but I wasn't able to hack into their system! I've heard someone say that the word "impossible" isn't in God's vocabulary. But there are a few times He uses it. In Hebrews 11:6 we read, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." So I'm not saying that the word "impossible" doesn't exist, I'm saying when it comes to living by faith in God we should remove the word "impossible" from our spiritual dictionary. Do you still have the word "impossible" in your personal dictionary? By the end of this message I hope you will join me in removing it! Let's learn three important truths about living by faith.

1. YOU WILL NEVER ACHIEVE THE IMPOSSIBLE IF YOU NEVER ATTEMPT THE IMPOSSIBLE

“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.” (17:20) How foolish would it look to walk up to a mountain and spoke to it? But unless you attempt to move the mountain, for sure you’ll never move the mountain. To put it another way, if you aim at nothing in life you will get a bull’s-eye every time. The people who accomplish great things for God are those who attempt great things for God.

One day a man was walking in the country and he saw an old barn. On the side of the barn, someone had drawn several dozen targets. And in the center of every bull’s-eye there was a bullet hole. The stranger commented to the farmer nearby. “You certainly are a great marksman, you hit center of every target.” The farmer said, “Not really. I shoot the bullet first, and then I draw a target around the bullet hole.” That’s the way some people live their lives; they play it safe and never set lofty goals. If you want to achieve the impossible, you’ve got to attempt the impossible.

Jesus said it doesn’t take a lot of faith, just a mustard-seed of faith. The mustard seed is tiny, but it contains life. A mountain is enormous, but it is dead. Jesus is saying a living faith can always overcome dead obstructions. A living faith can overcome impossibilities.

A few months ago I was reading through an issue of *Sports Illustrated* and saw a full-page ad about the word impossible. As I started reading it I thought it might be a Biblical ad encouraging Christians to have faith. The ad had these words against a plain black background: “Impossible is just a big word thrown around by small men who find it easier to live in the world they have been given than to explore the power they have to change it. Impossible is not a fact. It is an opinion. Impossible is not a declaration. It is a dare. Impossible is potential. Impossible is temporary. Impossible is nothing!” I was ready to shout, “Amen!” Then I noticed at the bottom that it was ad for Adidas. It seems that the advertisers for Adidas have a better handle on what mustard- seed faith is than most Christians!

For centuries humanity has watched the birds and dreamed of flying. But there were always negative voices that said that if God had intended man to fly He would have given them wings. But others took the opposite position and believed if man was never meant to fly God would have given him roots. And in 1903, two brothers in North Carolina, Orville and Wilbur Wright, attempted the impossible: Flying. The first attempt lasted two seconds but their final flight on that first day lasted almost a minute. They flew 850 feet at an altitude of 10 feet. A couple of weeks ago I flew back eleven hours from the other side of the globe at an altitude of seven miles. That Boeing 777 was using the same aerodynamic principles the Wright Brothers tamed. An unknown writer said: “To achieve all that is possible; We must attempt the impossible; To be as much as we can be; We must dream of being more.”

During World War 2, Americans had a can-do mentality that caused them to believe anything was possible. There was a slogan during that time that said, “If it’s difficult, it will take a day or two. If it’s impossible, it will take a little longer!”

That reminds me of a quote from J. Hudson Taylor, who was one of the pioneer missionaries to

China. He said: "There are three stages in any great work attempted for God: impossible, difficult, done!"

The Bible is filled with stories about people who attempted the impossible. Little David faced a 9-foot tall giant who was holding a spear that looked like a telephone pole. Winston Churchill said, "A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity. An optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty." King Saul was a classic pessimist. He told David, "Goliath is too big to fight." David said, "No, he's too big to MISS!" Saul was a big man, but when he looked at Goliath he thought, "Look how much BIGGER he is than me." All David thought was, "Look how much SMALLER he is than my God!"

The Christian songwriter Carmen had a song about this fight. He said, "Little David must have just been in his teens; When he faced Goliath of the Philistines. He was armed with just a slingshot and some stones. Now Goliath was a giant and as strong as a tank; And when he looked at men their stomachs sank; And there stood little David all alone. But with faith in God he flung that stone; And much to their surprise; He killed that monster with a rock that nailed him between the eyes. Then he decapitated his fallen foe; To make sure that he was dead; And showed everyone there he was someone who really know HOW to get a head!"

Unless you speak to the mountain, the mountain won't move. You'll never achieve the impossible until you attempt the impossible.

2. DON'T ATTEMPT THE IMPOSSIBLE IN YOUR OWN STRENGTH!

The disciples asked him, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" (17:19) The disciples were frustrated because they were unable to help the tormented boy. In the same way, we are powerless if we attempt the impossible in our own strength.

You may be thinking this is just one of those "possibility thinking" pep rallies. Possibility thinking says, "I can do all things!" But faith says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!" (Philippians 4:13) Zechariah 4:6 says, "You will not succeed by your own strength or power, but by my Spirit says the Lord."

In a few weeks we'll be in Matthew 19 and study the parable where Jesus says, "It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." His disciples were astonished, and they ask, "Who then CAN be saved?" To answer them, Jesus restated this same impossibility principle. He said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26) Jesus specializes in impossibilities! It's humanly impossible to walk on water, but Jesus did it. It's humanly impossible to feed 5,000 people with five biscuits and two sardines, but Jesus did it. It's humanly impossible to come back from the dead, but Jesus did it! Dr. Jesus is an impossibilitist!

Are you facing a mountain right now? You must admit, "God this is impossible for me, but with you all things are possible." Speak to the mountain in faith, and it will move!

Mountains come in all sizes. We make the mistake of identifying mountains as huge obstacles

like cancer, or losing a job, or a divorce. Those are enormous mountains, but mountains come in all sizes. There are simple things God commands us to do that seem impossible. How about where Jesus tells us to forgive those who have hurt us? That's impossible for us to do in our own strength.

Here's another mountain. Jesus says to love one another as He loves us: That's a mountain of impossibility. He even says to love our enemies—that's a larger mountain!

Let's do a little mountain moving. Have you discovered it is impossible to love some people in your own strength? I think sometimes God has a sense of humor and He brings unlovely people into our lives just so we can remind ourselves that we can't love people in our own strength.

Let's do a little experiment. I want you to think of someone right now that you are having a hard time loving, in fact, it seems impossible to love that person. I know you don't hate them, that's a sin, but I'm talking about a person that when you see them walking toward you, you go the other way. When you see their name on your caller ID, you don't answer. Someone who if you find out they are going to be at a dinner or a party, you're going to avoid them? Got somebody in mind? Good. By the way, have you considered the possibility that someone is thinking of YOU right now? Okay, back to this person. Do you think Jesus loves that person? Come on now, you KNOW He does! How can Jesus love him or her? Because God IS love and Jesus can see that person for who they can be, not who they are. So why don't you say, "Lord, it's impossible for me to love _____. But you said that with faith all things are possible. So, Jesus, please love that person through me." Now, if you have faith that Jesus can love that person through you, you've just moved a mountain.

E.M. Bounds, one of the leading experts on prayer has written: "Faith does the impossible because it brings God to undertake for us, and nothing is impossible with God."

While we're talking about mountain-moving faith, you might think Jesus is talking about removing bad mountains blocking your spiritual progress. But there is another way to think about what He said. In one respect, there is a good mountain that you want to move with you. Look at the words of Jesus again. He said, "You can say to THIS mountain, move from here to there, and it will move." He wasn't talking about just any mountain. No doubt Jesus pointed to Mt. Tabor, the mountain where His glory had been revealed. Peter, James, and John saw the power and majesty of Jesus on that mountain.

I wonder how many times those three disciples wished they could go back up on the mountain and experience that kind of spiritual power. Jesus was saying, "Guess what, guys? If you have a tiny bit of living faith, you can move this mountain from here to wherever you are. He was telling them they could carry that sense of the presence and power of the Lord wherever they went. Worship isn't about a place; it's about a person: Jesus. I don't have to go to Mount Tabor in Israel to experience the presence and power of the Jesus; I have moved that mountain right here to Tyler, Texas.

With faith you can move that mountain of Jesus' power and majesty right with you into your

home; you can move it right with you into your school. You can move that mountain right with you when you go to work. Speak to the mountain by faith and it will move with you.

Let's learn one more faith lesson:

3. PRAYER AND FASTING EMPOWERS YOUR FAITH

When the disciples asked the Master why they were unable to driving out the demon from the young man Jesus said, "This kind does not go out without prayer and fasting." (17:21) You may notice that this verse is added as a footnote in the NIV, because not all the Greek manuscripts have it, but I believe Jesus said it because it is recorded in the same setting in Mark 9:29. There's a great lesson here. When we face a spiritual challenge that seems impossible, we should consider praying and fasting about that impossibility.

We all know what praying is, but many Christians are ignorant of the spiritual discipline of praying and fasting. We know a lot more about feasting than about fasting! Fasting is typically defined as voluntarily going without food in order to focus on prayer and fellowship with God. You can pray without fasting, but if you fast without praying, it's just dieting.

But when you pray and fast together, you can find spiritual strength. Having a dedicated time of prayer and fasting is not a way of manipulating God into doing what you desire. Rather, it is simply forcing yourself to focus and rely on God for the strength, provision, and wisdom you need.

The New Testament never commands us to fast, but we read that Jesus prayed and fasted, and so did Paul, Barnabas and others. So, I highly recommend you consider prayer and fasting when you face an impossible challenge.

But too often people focus on the fasting more than the praying. Fasting should always be limited to a set time because not eating for extended periods can be damaging to the body. Always check with your doctor before starting a period of prayer and fasting. The purpose of prayer and fasting is NOT to lose weight, but rather to gain a deeper intimacy with God. By taking your eyes off the cravings of your body and the things of the world you can focus more clearly on Jesus.

Jesus even gave us some guidelines for fasting. He said, "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting...but when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Matthew 6:16-18) So, if you have the right attitude about prayer and fasting, nobody should even know when you're fasting.

Dr. Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ wrote: "Fasting is the most powerful spiritual discipline of all the Christian disciplines. Through fasting and prayer, the Holy Spirit can transform your life. According to Scripture, personal experience and observation, I am convinced that when God's people fast with a proper Biblical motive—seeking God's face not

His hand, with a broken and contrite spirit, God will hear from heaven and heal our lives, our churches, our communities, our nation and world. Fasting and prayer can bring about revival—a change in the direction of our nation, the nations of earth and the fulfillment of the Great Commission. God's awesome power can be released through you as you fast through the enabling of the Holy Spirit."

Do you need more spiritual power? Do you need to strengthen and deepen your faith? Are you facing impossibility? Remember, Jesus told the disciples that there are some challenges so difficult that they require prayer and fasting. Prayer and fasting will strengthen your faith so when you say, "Mountain, move!" The mountain moves.

My final faith quote is from J. Hudson Taylor: "Faith is telling the mountain to move and then being surprised **ONLY** when it doesn't." Amen!

CONCLUSION

Raphael was correct to portray these two miracles on the same canvas. The miracle of the Transfiguration on the mountaintop and the healing of this poor young man in the valley are really twin miracles. When you look at them together, they teach us an important lesson. The Transfiguration was all about seeing Jesus in all of His glory and worshipping Him—you could call that a mountaintop experience to be sure! This suffering boy in the valley reminds us that we shouldn't just be content with mountaintop experiences of thrilling worship. It's great to spend time on the mountain but you've got to go into the valley to serve the Lord by helping hurting people.

A man once told evangelist D.L. Moody, "I've been on the mount of Transfiguration with Jesus for the past five years!" Moody asked, "During that time, how many people have you won to Christ?" "None," he answered. Moody replied, "We don't need THAT kind of mountaintop experience! When a man gets so high he can't reach down and help sinners, there is something wrong!"

In my experience as a pastor, I've known folks who never leave the valley. They work, work, work for Jesus but they never visit the mountaintop and enjoy sweet intimacy with Him. Worship is almost a waste of time for them. Or they say, "The way I worship is by working for Jesus." They look with disdain at mountaintop worshipers and wonder when they are going to come down and get to work!

I've also known some who only want to spend time in worship on the mountaintop. They enjoy the feeling of security and serenity that comes from being alone with the Lord. They look at the "workers" and shake their head at their toil and efforts.

But we must maintain a cycle of both worship of the Lord and work for the Lord. When we have been on the mountain and seen the glory of Jesus, we will be willing to go out into the valley and help others.

This principle of worship and work is beautifully illustrated in the story of the visit that Jesus

made to the house of Mary and Martha. Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to Him—a picture of worship. Meanwhile Sister Martha is working away in the kitchen—she’s a worker. Martha finally got upset and barged into the room and ordered Jesus to tell Mary to get up and help her in the kitchen. Jesus said, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things, but Mary has chosen the ONE THING that won’t be taken away.” That’s where the story ends. I’d like to think Martha turned off her oven and then sat down at the feet of Jesus with Mary. Then, after a time of fellowship, Mary and Martha both got up and served lunch to the Lord. We don’t know what happened, but we know what Jesus said. He was giving us the proper priority—first worship, then work.

Our spiritual lives are a little like a sponge. When we worship, we’re filled up with the joy and majesty of the Lord. When we serve the Lord, it’s like squeezing out the water. If all you ever do is worship, you’ll just soak it all in and eventually sour. But if you never worship and try to serve God it’s like trying to squeeze a bone-dry sponge. When you maintain a healthy cycle of worship and work, you can make a difference in God’s world.

So, go to the mountain often and worship Jesus but make sure you leave the mountain to go into the valley: That’s where there are hurting people. And with the supernatural power of Jesus, nothing shall be impossible for you. So why don’t you join me and remove the word “impossible” from your dictionary?

OUTLINE

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The disciples asked him, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" *17:19*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes