

Faith as small of a mustard seed

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Date: 17 August 2025

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[0 : 00] Chapter 13, verses 10 to 24. Luke 13, 10 to 24. On the Sabbath, Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years.

! She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.

Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, There are six days for work, so come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.

The Lord answered him, You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give water?

Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?

[1 : 15] When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing. Then Jesus asked, What is the kingdom of God like?

What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches.

Again he asked, What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour, until it worked all through the dough.

Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem.

Someone asked him, Lord, are only a few people going to be saved? He said to them, Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.

Before Craig comes to preach, we're going to sing Living Hope. Lord Jesus, we thank you for the living hope that you really are.

[2 : 31] You really are, Lord. That first Easter Sunday morning, when it was all fulfilled, regulations, rules, religion was fulfilled, and the one final thing that completed it all was when your buried body began to breathe.

Thank you that you did. You rose again. Your word never returns void. Bless us now as we look at your word. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Moses had a simple staff.

David had a little pebble. Rahab had a rope. A boy had a packed lunch.

Simple, small objects offering little help. But, but, but, objects held by four people who had even just a tiny little bit of faith.

[4 : 00] And so with their tiny or big, however small or big it was, little bit of faith firmly placed in the hands of God, Moses' staff was then used to deliver Israel from slavery.

In the hands of God, David's pebble brought about the ultimate defeating of the Philistines. In the hands of God, Rahab's rope prepared the perfect escape route.

And in the hands of God, and a little bit of faith, a boy's lunch brought about the feeding of thousands.

And there is many, many, many, many more examples throughout the Bible of little deeds amounting to big outcomes.

But perhaps, one of the most powerful ones appears in John chapter 11. Because by verse 17, Jesus has arrived.

[5 : 15] Feel free to turn to it if you'd like to. John chapter 11. By verse 17, Jesus has arrived at Mary and Martha's, where he encounters a grieving community.

And his friend Lazarus has been dead and buried four days now. And in verse 21, Martha says, Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that even now, God will give you whatever you ask.

Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again, will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection. Who believes in me, will live even though they die.

And whoever believes in me, will never die. Then asks, do you believe this? Yes, Lord, she replied, of God, who has come into the world.

Later, by the tomb, verse, Jesus says, take the stone away, open the tomb. But, but Martha begins to say, and verse 40, Jesus says, Martha, Martha, didn't I tell you just a few minutes ago, just back there, that if, if, if you believe, you will see the glory of God.

[6 : 53] Martha quietens down, calms down, gives a little nod, okay, I believe. And so her faith, her little expression of faith, no matter how small or big it was, it was enough.

It was all Jesus needed. And on the back of that, her faith, verse 43, Lazarus, come out. The dead man came out and he was alive.

And so, just as with the others, with the other great examples, here also, in the hands of God, a little bit of faith is enough even to raise the dead.

In our next part of Luke's biography, which Richard read from, we've been working through the biography of Jesus according to Dr. Luke. And in this next bit of this biography, there's an awful big scene playing out.

Jesus is at worship on his Sabbath. The enemy is on the move, looking to cause mayhem as always. Jesus, as always, flowing with compassion, takes heart on this crippled lady.

[8 : 20] And with his mighty, miraculous hands, heals her, sets her free. And that's when Satan attacks. Come on, Pharisees, he says, don't ignore this.

show yourselves to be in charge here. And the synagogue leader takes the bait. Look, healing is all well and good, yeah, but on the other six days, not on the Sabbath.

There's a deathly silence, I imagine, a standoff between those who, via faith, want to declare praise for what God's just done.

And those who, in lacking faith, want to destroy Jesus. The seconds tick by, ten seconds, seems like a thousand. There was always, faith wins.

Verse 12, the Lord answered, you hypocrites, and goes on to point out that even they wouldn't leave a donkey to thirst on the Sabbath, but out of care would work to look after their livestock, even on the Sabbath.

[9 : 29] And that clears everything up nicely for the big crescendo to the scene. This lady, a child of God, has been kept bound by the enemy, by Satan, these 18 long years.

And she has kept her faith these 18 long years. She has kept her faith in God through it all. God is fighting back. And no matter what Satan is doing, God is enabling people to have faith.

And most, most of them take it. Whereas the Pharisees ignore the prompt to believe, verse 17 finishes with, but the people were delighted.

And we can only imagine the buzz and the conversations as they all left the synagogue that day.

Everyone asking, what happened in there? And more importantly, asking, how did it happen?

And so Jesus, keeping the attention of his delighted hearers, is keen to turn that delight into rock-solid faith. Well, here's how it happened. He knows the Pharisees are making it difficult for people to have faith and to keep faith.

[10 : 49] And so, in a lesson to take the pressure off, he teaches, Luke, Luke, even just a little bit of faith for me.

And to do so, he begins by asking, just what is the kingdom of God like? His answer, a mustard seed. Jesus explains, the kingdom is beginning quietly.

It's beginning lowly, in the background, if you like, much like the little mustard seed. The tiniest of seeds begins quietly and without causing any disturbance to the rest of the garden.

It's planted deep in and out of the way and peacefully in the background begins to take root and slowly but surely it takes deeper root, grows, expands, develops, moves, growing not just up but out and across, going far and beyond its own little soil patch, taking over the whole patch and eventually spurting out and across the entire garden.

So the kingdom of God which is slowly beginning by being sown by a small group of disciples in Israel would eventually be the biggest and largest thing on the earth.

[12 : 24] Jesus said this to a generation who would not actually see it, who would only witness the planting. And two thousand years later for us being able to look back and see just how it all came to be is incredible.

It's incredible. Think about this. By the time Jesus was buried he had a couple of handfuls of followers. Some scattered disciples and Joseph Nicodemus, his mother.

Because don't forget, John tells us that at that festival when he made his teachings very clear that he clearly is God, John says many disciples deserted him there.

So again, by the time of his burial there's not that many left. And by the time of his ascension to heaven, Jesus is really talking to a couple of dozen or so, giving them the great commission to go. And in particular eleven. Eleven disciples take the command and quietly go. Soon there's a hundred and twenty. Soon there's three thousand one hundred and twenty after Peter's preach.

[13 : 38] And then bang! Persecution comes. And lo and behold, they travel all over the then known world. Thousands and thousands are added.

And so yes, as Jesus hinted here way back in the first century, by now, 2025, the Christian faith, his kingdom, is indeed all over the world.

The kingdom has well and truly grown from that little mustard seed to this. But there's certainly another side to all this.

Jesus, as always, soon makes it personal. For just after this little parable, travelling the lands, doing his work, preaching, and being asked, verse 23, Lord, are only a few people going to be saved? And he looks at humanity, and he looks at us, and he says, verse 24 there, make every effort to enter through the narrow door.

[14 : 48] water. This wasn't a first for Jesus. He had previously taught this on a few occasions.

Most famously, of course, in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7, verse 13, he says, enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to life, to destruction.

And many enter through it, but small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. Jesus' response to verse 23's question is that he and he alone is the one true set way into heaven.

Now, on that topic, we live in a day and an age when we are accused of being narrow-minded for holding such a stance, which is, of course, is a mind fed by the enemy in the first place.

Just the same way he looked for ways to entice and wind up the Pharisees against Jesus, he still does today to people of such thoughts. But what actually is happening here is that God is making entrance into heaven or getting saved, as the questioner calls it, God is making entrance really, really, really, really easy.

[16 : 22] Very, very, very, very simple. He says, you don't need to waste your life pursuing other safe doors or horoscopes or whatever it may be.

There is no need to look at all the false religions, no need to check the stars or read cards, because the one set way into heaven is only Jesus. And therefore, entrance into heaven is very, very easy.

In fact, for as contradictive as this may sound, truth is, the way to heaven is so narrow and so small that it's actually really, really accessible, really easy, because the only question is, if it's not Jesus, then it's not it.

The way to heaven, so narrow, so small, you can't actually miss it. If you're not looking at Jesus, you don't have it. So small, so simple, yet so powerful.

God sees all the other faiths and religions, false religions, and everything else as one and the same. All those horoscopes and card readings and everything else, they're all one big, massive, wide, open path.

[17 : 43] It has to be a big path to hold all that in it, and so there's only one other path. Very narrow, narrow because there's only one on it, Jesus.

And so this narrowness is a real act of love from God to us. He is saying to make it as simple as possible for you, I've made the way so narrow, so small, so you can't get confused.

Just come in. But Jesus knows living his ways are not very popular in the world, and that many would sadly be tempted to go down that big, wide path to look good in the world's eyes.

And so he is very, very clear in verse 24, isn't he? Make every effort. And so how exactly do we make every effort?

Well, wonderfully, as we have been saying, Jesus promises that if we have even just a tiny little bit of faith, just mustard-side faith, then he has the power to take that, and not only take us to heaven,

but to have us on that narrow path forever.

[19 : 13] such faith, he can get us going and do incredible things through here on earth as well. And so back to our opening words, Moses had a staff, David had a pebble, Rahab a rope, a boy a lunch, and because they all held those items with even just a little bit of faith, even just mustard-sized faith, God was able to use them to do mighty, courageous actions.

Again, most supremely when we read from Martha's account, there by the tomb, having earlier had that conversation, she mustered a simple little bit of faith, and Jesus responded, as he will and does for us.

You see, Jesus' mustard-seed example is not only relevant to the group of the kingdom, but in as much to our lives.

The day and hour we chose to believe in Jesus, he at that very, very moment planted within us the seed of Christianity.

And yes, understandably, it begins slowly, and sometimes, not always though, not always though, we're not that different to begin with.

[20 : 47] But, we pray every day, we read the Bible every day, we study it, we begin to seek his advice in the little parts of life, namely, namely just the big decisions, because all the rest of stuff doesn't matter.

Then, as the seed grows and we get closer to him, we start talking about the smaller things as well, including him in all parts of life. Eventually, we grow so deep with Jesus and get so close to him that soon we're talking to him about everything, from what we're going to have for dinner, to what church we'll go to, and all the rest of it, because the relationship grows and gets bigger and better and grittier, to the point we're just best friends.

And so we get involved in the church, we study and truly worship, and then as the oomph grows, the seed is growing, you can't help but publicly get baptized and thank him with your church family for what he's done.

Then, you find yourself thinking, is my day job God's will? What skills and gifts has he actually given me to use for his church? I'll move my life around now to be more in line with his will.

Use him for the kingdom instead, and so on, and so on, and so on, and so on, and so on, that mustard seed, that was put into you the day you trusted him has taken over your entire life, and everything you do is about the kingdom, just as Jesus' little example.

[22 : 16] And soon you're looking like Jesus, acting like Jesus, thinking like Jesus, living better ways, living God's ways more and more, though, maybe, maybe like me, upon hearing this, you find yourself thinking, if that's really true, if that's really how it works, you know, you take a step of faith, mustard seed step, God enters your life, slowly but surely you start to live and act like Jesus more and more.

If that's truly how it works, then, why am I still like me? why do I still lose my temper, give in to temptation, keep doing the wrong stuff?

Well, maybe this little story about a lady on the seashore of Ireland at the turn of the 20th century might help. She was rather wealthy, a little bit eccentric, so the locals weren't too surprised when she was the first to have electricity installed into her home.

all was up and running a few weeks, went by, and soon a meter reader came out to read the electricity. He did so, and then calling on the door afterwards, he asked, Miss, is your electricity actually working?

Oh, yes, she assures him. He replies, great. He says, well, there seems to be hardly any usage there, so if it's working, do you actually use it? Oh, yes, she says, each evening after supper, I flick the lights on, quickly light all the candles, and then get the electric bag off.

[24 : 02] She was tapped into the power, but she rarely used it. And don't we sometimes make the same mistake? We are connected to the king.

God has planted within us the mustard-sized seed of faith, faith, but we don't engage with him every day, every hour. And therefore, just like this lady, we do not get his power within us.

Or maybe, maybe like this lady, we tap into God once a day, have a quick prayer, and then forget about him until tomorrow. And then we wonder why we're not living and acting like him, Christian ways, doing good.

again, same answer. Because we need to leave the light switch on. We need to keep connected to him every day, every moment, every hour, in every way, so that the original mustard-sized seed

faith that he put within us may grow, may expand, and so that God can take our lives and eventually do mighty, great stuff with us.

Jesus' words here are, make sure you are through the narrow door. When in, stay in, let the seed of faith grow, and you will do amazing things, and eventually be in his amazing heaven.

[25 : 40] Let's pray. Let's pray. Jesus we thank you that in spite of what the world may tell us you have made entrance into heaven a very simple job thank you that you just say get a little bit of faith I'll do the rest and so I pray Lord that all of us here are able to have that faith enjoy that faith, grow in that faith and tell others about that faith Lord I pray that if anyone here is yet to make that first step of faith that they would do so this day and I pray for us as a fellowship at Westerhills Baptist Church that we Lord would all together leave the light switch on keep connecting with you and encourage one another in our journey with you keep us in good faith keep us close to you Jesus and bless us always now and forever in your good name God

Amen if you are available at 6pm this evening for devotions and fellowship you'll be more than welcome and whilst I remember if you are able to help with the catering of that please I would love your help with that let's pray may you go forth this day in the knowledge that you have personally entered the narrow gate and may the peace love joy and goodness of God go with you enabling you to live like him to tell this faith to others that they too may know the invite to come through that narrow gate and to the peace of God go with you the fellowship of the Holy Spirit abound in you and the faith of Jesus be in your heart now and always Amen Amen Thank you.