

## Moving Mountains

### A Lesson in the Power of Faith

The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke record an event in which a man appealed to Jesus to cast a demon out of his horribly afflicted son. It was clear that the man loved his boy deeply and he agonized over the immense pain his child had to endure. When the father described this ordeal to the Messiah, he said, “it [the demon] dashes him down and he foams and grinds his teeth, and he pines away” (Mk. 9:18). The apostle Matthew records that the man also told Jesus that his son “suffered grievously” and that he would often “fall into fire and water” (Mt.17:15). Luke’s account reveals that the demon tore at the boy causing him to foam at the mouth (Lk.9:39).

Imagine if this was your child. Think of how desperate you would be to help him. Every second of his agony would be a second of your agony. It would be nothing less than unimaginable torture—and like any loving parent you would seek out every remedy possible. This is exactly what the man did.

It is interesting to note that Jesus was not the first person this desperate father sought out to heal his son. Each of the synoptic gospels indicates that he initially sought out the Messiah’s disciples and begged them to exorcise this evil spirit from the boy. Regrettably, they could not—which brings us to a profound lesson Jesus would teach His disciples, and by extension, all of God’s people today.

After the Messiah commanded the demon to leave the child, His disciples came to Him and asked why they couldn’t perform this miracle. Jesus informed them that they lacked the faith to prevail with God the Father regarding the boy’s affliction. His exact words were “Because of your unbelief” (Mt. 17:20). He would also inform them that this demon was extraordinarily strong and could only be removed through a closeness to God that is cultivated by prayer and fasting.

Perhaps the most remarkable statement made by the Messiah in connection to the power of faith came during this exchange with His disciples. Notice what Jesus said.

And Jesus said unto them, “...for verily I say unto you, If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.” (Mt.17: 20)

Imagine the scope of this statement. Here, the Messiah is claiming that faith can literally move something as massive as a mountain. But how is such a thing possible? Can this fruit of the spirit (Gal. 6:22) really accomplish such an extraordinary feat? Furthermore, is there any evidence that anything remotely close to moving a mountain has been achieved by faith? The answer to this question is revealed in another great miracle performed by Jesus. Furthermore, this other miracle has a striking parallel to the one just described. Consider this great story.

### **The Syro-Phoenician Woman**

Earlier in His ministry Jesus was approached by a gentile woman (Canaanite) whose daughter was severely demon possessed. As a loving mother she too sought out the Messiah and begged Him to help her little girl. At first things didn’t go well. Jesus wouldn’t even speak to her.

Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.” But he answered her not a word... (Mt.15: 21-23)

As her desperation grew, the woman pursued Jesus' disciples. She was apparently so tenacious in her plea that the disciples appealed to Jesus to send her away.

...And his disciples came and besought him, saying, "Send her away; for she cries after us." (Mt. 15:23)

Some scholars have suggested that the woman may have been begging the disciples to plead her case to Jesus on her behalf. In other words she was imploring them to ask Jesus to heal her daughter. Certainly He would listen to them. After all, they were His followers—His trusted friends. If this was her intent, it did not appear to be working. Jesus words to the disciples seemed to be even more firm. He wasn't going to heal the girl.

But he answered and said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Mt. 15:24)

When the woman heard Jesus' answer she did not give up. On the contrary, she pursued her petition even more passionately. She now ran toward the Messiah and fell down before Him begging Him to help her little girl. However, once again it didn't seem to persuade Jesus to change His position. On the contrary, He seemed more determined than ever to not intervene.

Then came she and worshipped him, saying, "Lord, help me." But he answered and said, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. " (Mt. 15:25-26)

At this point most people would have gone away sorrowful. But this loving mother was not about to give up. She actually had the audacity to counter Jesus' words—and she did so with conviction and force.

And she said, "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." (Mt. 15:27)

This exchange between the Lamb of God and a gentile woman had all the appearances of a classic debate—point, counter-point, point, counter-point. The question now was, could she actually persuade Jesus to change His position? Could she move Him to do what He said he would not do? The next verse answers that question.

Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. (Mt.15: 28)

Few stories in the Bible can match the wonderful power of faith demonstrated by this loving mother. This woman was absolutely convinced that Jesus could bring relief to the child she cared about so much. Her story had striking similarities to the one in which Jesus healed the boy who threw himself into fire and water. It also had one glaring difference. First let's examine the similarities.

- Both miracles involved parents.
- Both parents appealed to Jesus to heal someone other than themselves—their child.
- Both children were severely demon possessed.
- Both parents also sought out the disciples for help.
- In both cases the disciples were unable to provide relief.

- Both children were healed.
- Both children were made whole within the hour.

### Now for the differences

In both cases Jesus was moved by faith. In one case the absence of it. In the other case, the abundance of it.

In one miracle Jesus taught His disciples that faith could move mountains. In the other miracle, faith actually moved a mountain.

At this point some may be wondering how the Syro-Phoenician woman moved a mountain. After all, where was the mountain? The mountain was Jesus Christ. This truth is graphically borne out in the scriptures.

When speaking to His disciples, Jesus revealed that He was the rock on which His Church would be built (Mt.16:18). The Greek word for rock in this verse is *petra* (Strong's 4073) and denotes a "massive rock"—one that is ironically unmovable. But the scriptures also reveal that Jesus is a "mountain." Consider the following.

### "A Great Mountain"

Over one hundred years after the nation of Israel was routed by Assyria, the southern kingdom of Judah met with a similar fate. They were defeated and led into captivity by the great Chaldean empire under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar. During this captivity, certain young Jews were taken to Babylon to serve at the pleasure of their new king. These men were chosen because of their extraordinary knowledge and wisdom (Dan. 1:3-4). This "Babylonian captivity" is described extensively in the book of Daniel.

#### **A Troubling Dream**

At one point while these captives were in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar had a very troubling dream, causing him considerable distress. To remedy this problem, he summoned the leading magicians, astrologers, and sorcerers throughout his kingdom and demanded that they explain what his dream meant. In order to be sure this religious "brain trust" wasn't simply guessing at their interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar would not disclose what the specific dream was. He actually informed his religious advisors that the dream was "forgotten." However, despite this lapse in memory, he insisted that these wizards conjure it up again and explain its significance. In other words, the king wanted these men to explain what the dream WAS, as well as what the dream MEANT. Failure to accomplish this task would constitute a capital offense and would result in their death.

Suffice it to say sheer panic filled the heart of virtually every soothsayer in Babylon. If they couldn't figure out what Nebuchadnezzar's dream was, they would find themselves on the wrong end of an execution. These men knew all too well that their king was not simply issuing an idle threat. He was "dead" serious.

When word of the king's decree reached the Jewish captive Daniel, he appealed to Nebuchadnezzar to be patient and promised that shortly he would tell the king both the dream and its meaning. But how would he do such a thing?

Clearly, this was going to be a daunting task. But Daniel had extraordinary resources, not the least of which was God Almighty. He immediately informed his fellow Jewish exiles of the king's

decree, and appealed to them to ask God to reveal his dream, so that they would not suffer at the hands of the royal executioner (Dan. 2:17-18). The scriptures indicate that God heard their prayers and made known the king's secret to Daniel in a dream of his own. Daniel then acknowledged God as the Source of all wisdom as well as the One who reveals every mystery.

Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are His: And He changes the times and the seasons: He removes kings, and He sets up kings: He gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: He reveals the deep and secret things: He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him. I thank you, and praise you, O thou God of my fathers, who has given me wisdom and might, and has made known unto me now what we desired of you: for you have made known unto us the king's matter. (Dan. 2:20-23)

Shortly after his prayer, Daniel appeared before Nebuchadnezzar and informed him that only the true God could do what the king had demanded. He then told him that such a God does exist and that He would now make known to Nebuchadnezzar both the dream and its meaning.

At this point, Daniel described the king's dream in striking detail. He began by informing him that the dream was prophetic and revealed a picture of world events that would come to pass down through the centuries.

As for you, O king, your thoughts came into your mind upon your bed, *what should come to pass hereafter: and He that reveals secrets makes known to you what shall come to pass.* (Dan. 2:29)

Nebuchadnezzar must have been stunned as he listened to Daniel reconstruct every facet of his vision. No detail was omitted, including where the king was when the dream first came to him. The precision of Daniel's words left no doubt that his God was real and that He was aware of man's most private thoughts and intimate secrets.

First, Daniel explained that in this dream, the king saw a great image. When describing this image, Daniel indicated that its head was made of gold, its breast and arms were silver, its belly and thighs brass, while its legs were made of iron and its feet consisted of part iron and part clay (Dan. 2:32-33). Daniel went on to explain that this image was utterly destroyed by a very unique rock. This rock would then become a great mountain and fill the entire earth. Notice Daniel's words as he describes this part of the vision.

You saw (the image) till a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and broke them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: *and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.* (Dan. 2:34-35)

With these words, Daniel informed the king of exactly what he had been dreaming. Imagine how you would feel if someone could tell you your dreams without ever hearing about them. But that is exactly what God did through Daniel. Such power is unimaginable. And Daniel stood as undeniable proof that his God had that power.

### **The Meaning of a Dream**

Despite the miraculous nature of Daniel's revelation, what would happen next was simply monumental. Daniel would then do something so unbelievable that it continues to mystify many scholars to this very day. He would provide the king with the meaning of his vision.

However, unlike the generic interpretations Nebuchadnezzar must have heard throughout his rule, the one he was about to hear was going to be very specific. He was going to learn from this Jewish captive God's pronouncement regarding how human history would ultimately play out. Furthermore, so accurate was Daniel's interpretation of this dream, that many modern scholars believe it wasn't even given by Daniel at all, but was rather told centuries later and attributed to him. However, Jesus Christ Himself attributed the prophecies recorded in the book of Daniel to the young Jewish captive who spoke to Nebuchadnezzar about his troubling dream (Mt. 24:15). Daniel began by explaining that the image in the king's dream symbolized a series of kingdoms that would rule the earth. The first kingdom, pictured by the head of gold, was Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon. In Daniel's words, "You are this head of gold" (Dan. 2:38). He then informed the king that other rulers and nations would follow the great Chaldean empire. These kingdoms would be inferior to Babylon, but would nevertheless be great in their own right.

And after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to you, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: for as iron breaks in pieces and subdues all things: and as iron breaks all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise. (Dan. 2:39-40)

History reveals that God's word, through Daniel, had pinpoint accuracy. Great world-ruling empires fell just as he had predicted. The Babylonian Empire was ultimately conquered by a less sophisticated Medo-Persian kingdom under the leadership of Cyrus the Great and King Darius. However, this kingdom would also fall and eventually be supplanted by the Greco Macedonian Empire under the rule of Alexander the Great. His empire would extend its influence to all the known world, just as Daniel had said. Finally, as powerful as Greece was, it too would fade into the pages of history and be replaced by the Roman Empire under the rule of the Caesars.

### **The Greatest Kingdom**

But Daniel wasn't finished interpreting the king's dream. He would now reveal the true identity of the rock that would destroy the last generation of these kingdoms. This generation was symbolized by the feet of this great image. These feet were made of a mixture of iron and clay and were an extension of the Roman Empire. This "resurrected" Roman Empire would exist in the very last days of man's reign on earth and exert tremendous influence throughout the world.

Daniel explained that at this time, God Himself was going to subdue all the kingdoms of the earth and set up a Government that would be presided over by a Great Deliverer. Furthermore, this new Government would never be destroyed.

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a Kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the Kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the Great God has made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter... (Dan. 2:44-45)

The stone that was "cut out without hands," is none other than Jesus Christ. Furthermore, that stone will become a great mountain and fill the whole earth. That mountain is what the Syro-Phoenician woman moved with her passionate faith. What seemed to be impossible became real because a woman's faith was genuine.

### **A Lesson for Today**

The great example of faith displayed by a gentile woman so very long ago is real. The story of its influence on the Savior of the world is also real. He is profoundly moved by it. It touches Him in a way few things do. The good news is that it can be a part of our lives too.

In closing consider the following absolute moral law. Faith moves God. And God moves everything else. When His people today come to that realization, they too will be able to MOVE MOUNTAINS.