

Christianityworks
Having Faith that Moves Mountains
057-1
Lift Up Your Eyes

If what you are looking for is to discover the truth about a faith sooo deep and sooo mighty that it can move mountains, then our programmes over these next few weeks are definitely for you.

Starting at the End

You know something? I'm really excited today because today on the programme we are kicking off a four week series on faith. I've called it "Having Faith that Moves Mountains". Jesus once said to His disciples,

"Have faith in God. Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, "Be taken up and thrown into the sea," and if you do not doubt in your heart, but you believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours."

That's Mark chapter 11, verses 22 to 24.

Now, if you take Him at His Word and I am one of those crazies who absolutely does, then this is an outrageous statement, right? Does He really mean that for you and for me? I mean, I for one have believed until I burst, for something and I didn't get it. And I have seen people who take this whole 'faith' thing way too far, believing for outrageously selfish things. And yet this God who sent us His Son, He talks a lot about faith and the only sort of faith He seems to talk about is the sort of faith that moves mountains. I have spent a lot of time thinking about that, so if you are up for it, let's kick off a few weeks, just chatting and exploring and let's see what that comes up with.

I visited an elderly man recently who is in the last few weeks of his life. He was dying of cancer. I'd spoken to him on the phone a few weeks before and this is what he said. "Well, I have believed in Jesus almost all of my life but I'm not sure where I am going when I die." Well, what an amazing time that was. I frankly felt a little uncertain about visiting him – this whole pastoral thing isn't really my strong point. I was telling myself that as I pressed the doorbell. He showed me into his lounge room. He sat in his favourite chair over in that corner, me in a dining chair over on this side.

As we began talking, I looked down at his feet – he was wearing a pair of slippers, both of which had holes in the toes. And you know, my immediate thought was, 'Oh, he needs some new slippers.' But then it struck me, at this point in his life, the very last thing he needed was a new pair of slippers. As the time passed I felt more and more at ease with this man. Whereas before, I had been wondering what, if anything useful, I could share with him, (you can tell I'm a preacher). As the moments ticked by, I was overwhelmed with a sense of deep privilege of being allowed to be in this place with him. It was such a special time and you know, the last thing he said to me as we shook hands on the front porch in the bright sunlight was a confident, 'You know we'll meet again but not here.'

Sometimes it's just the little encouragement that we need to discover that seed of faith that God's planted in our hearts has in fact, grown into a mighty tree. That's exactly what he needed – not sage words of advice or a sermon on faith, just the quiet assurance that comes when we rediscover the faith within – a faith that had become clouded by the deep cares of the present. Because that's what happened to him – he'd been walking all his life with Jesus – as long as he could remember, he told me – but with cancer ready to take his body, all of a sudden the realities of his circumstances started to take over.

I wonder how you and I will feel when, one day, we don't need new slippers anymore. I wonder how we will confront the greatest reality of all – that one day we will breathe our last breath on this earth. How healthy will our faith be on that day? The things that we struggled so hard for; the things that we always took for granted; the things that somehow, we duped ourselves into believing would be forever, don't matter anymore. Ever wondered why we need faith? For me, beginning at the end like this brings that into sharper focus.

It's not just death that we have to confront one day, all of us, but life – today, tomorrow, the next day, next year – everyday life. And in that life that you and I lead, we know all too well that there are things that happen that are bigger than us – things that overwhelm us; things that are outside our control – everyday we face challenges – everyday. Things happen that can rob us of the confidence to live life.

And it seems to me the central reality that demands faith is this: that there are things out there, outside our circle of control or influence; things that sometimes we can't even see and don't even understand, that can impact negatively on our interests – on our health, our wellbeing, our finances, our career, our relationships, on

our very lives. You name it – any hope, any dream, any desire and there is something lurking out there that can rob us of the good things that in our heart of hearts, we have planned for ourselves.

And they don't have to be particularly selfish or self centred – just ordinary everyday very reasonable things. Sometimes they are really good things – the dreams we have in our hearts to serve God – the deep desire we have to be part of His plan for this world. It doesn't matter what it is, there are things out there that can rob us of what we have planned.

And those things, they show up in a number of different ways. They can show up as fears and worries – we brood over things; we worry about them and the more we worry, the more fear grips and immobilises us. They can show up as insurmountable obstacles or barriers – things we just can't overcome – doubts sneak under our guard. They can show up as challenges that we would love to meet but we can't. Have you ever had that sense of, 'WOW, I should be able to do this, but.....' They can show up as a deep sense of inadequacy.

The man addicted to pornography who try as he may, simply can't break his cycle of shame, so he lives in his secret shame - the woman who deep within the fibre of her very being, knows that she simply isn't good enough and what's more, she never will be.

They can show up as deep regrets from the past. So many people allow the past to destroy their present and rob them of their future. And here's what I know: for each one of us there are one or two of those things on that list that resonate deeply and as we each examine our hearts and look into those darker recesses – that we try not to look into often – there's an ache. 'If only....if only I could be set free from these things.' 'If only those things out there, outside my control; those things I'm afraid of; those things that can rob me of the good hopes and dreams and plans of my heart - if only I could get rid of them, how wonderful my life would be.'

Faith Brings Freedom

It turns out that when we apply faith to something we are concerned about; something that we have been worrying about, well, faith brings freedom. That's where we were earlier but let's unpack that together for a moment. Freedom is a commodity that many of us take for granted but if we stop to consider it, we would realise just how highly we value it. Freedom! But are we really, really free? That's the question!

Jesus once had this to say on the subject:

"If you continue in My Word you are truly My disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." You see, they answered Him – they said, *"We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying to us, "You will be made free?" And Jesus said to them, "Truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the Son has a place there forever so if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."* That comes from John chapter 8, verses 31 to 36.

Isn't it fascinating? Jesus said to those who believed in Him, *"I will set you free,"* and instead of thanking Him or shouting *"Halleluiah,"* they took umbrage with what He said. *'We don't need setting free. We're not slaves.'* Isn't that the case with us too? So many people living their lives following hard after the success that this world offers, imaging somehow that we are free, when all the time, actually, we are slaves – slaves to this world.

We think that we're citizens of this world – we behave as though this world is forever. Deep down we know that's not true but we behave as though it is. We live as though it is – we make our financial decisions as though it is. We make our career decisions as though it is. We treat people as though it is because we want to believe that this lie is true. Oh no, really? Let me ask you about the last major financial decision you made – the last time you splurged on something for yourself – the last time..... How much did the eternal consequences of those decisions weigh on your mind?

We are here for a time but *"it's not our permanent home. Our citizenship is in heaven and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."* Philippians chapter 3, verse 20. The reason so many people are slaves is because they have bought into the citizenship of this earth.

There's a new term that has crept into the English language – it's called *'short-termism'*. It describes the reality that so many people spend so much of their lives thinking about the next plasma TV and worrying about the debt they're in, that they have forgotten how to be free. We have forgotten how to dream, how to live, how to hope.

I have a beautiful park that I go walking in often. See, I love the exercise and this park has trees and fields and lakes and swans and flowers – it is one of the most beautiful places you would ever want to go walking. And I realised after a while, that I was walking,

looking down, concentrating on my stride, looking at the pavement instead of God's beautiful creation. What a waste, don't you think?

So why is it so many people are living their lives like that – in slavery rather than freedom? Now what does this have to do with faith? It's not a bad question – we do seem to have digressed a little, but if that's the question you have rolling around in your mind just at the moment, here's my answer – everything, absolutely everything because if the truth be known, this is how most people live their lives – as slaves to the here and now. As short-termists who can barely see the ends of their noses.

Conditioned by the advertising industry to react to this music and those images and that colour and this smell that they pump through the store to induce us to buy into a world where we really don't belong. And then, here it is.....here's the link – then we reduce faith to being something that gets us out of the debt we are in so that we can spend some more money. We bring God down to our level instead of lifting up our eyes to His. And then we wonder why this faith thing isn't working so well. Hello!!

I have heard faith reduced down to 'name it and claim it', 'blab it and grab it'. Isn't that what Jesus meant when He said

"Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, if you say to this mountain be lifted up and thrown into the sea, if you do not doubt in your heart but you believe that what you have said will come to pass, it will be done for you. So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours."

What did Jesus mean by that? Did He mean we get anything our little heart's desire? I don't think so, in fact, I know that's not what He meant because this very same Jesus said in Luke chapter 14, verses 26 and 27,

"Whoever comes to Me and doesn't hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even life itself, cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow Me, cannot be My disciple."

In fact, the more you read of what Jesus said the more you realise that either He needed a better spin doctor to help Him get His message out or He never really intended to fit into our twenty first century consumerist short-termism. Now let me think, which one of those statements is true? And if Jesus wanted to plug neatly in our contemporary consumerism mind set then it would seem to me, the

thing about believing and receiving on the one hand and losing our life on the other hand, was a contradiction. Either that or He never intended to pander to us in the first place and therefore, He meant something quite different.

Time to Raise Your Gaze

The more selfish we become, the more faith yields nothing. I learned that the hard way. 'Oh God, please give me that latest flashy, shiny, new car.' So He doesn't! And then we go, 'Well, that didn't work, did it? Faith, pah! So if you were hoping for me to put some nice safe spin on this whole 'faith' thing; the sort of spin that will pander to your every desire; the sort that will encourage you with the assurance that you can indeed have anything that your little consumers heart desires for itself, if you just believe - I'm sorry, but you are going to be disappointed.

On the other hand, if what you are looking for is to discover the truth about a faith so deep and so mighty that it can move mountains - if you hunger to experience the power of Christ Himself, working in you and through you to achieve mighty things.....things that you are afraid even to dream about, then our programmes over these next few weeks are definitely for you.

See, the last time I checked, when Jesus was brutally nailed to a cross, He didn't have a BMW parked in the driveway of His mansion, nor was He wearing a Rolex watch - in fact, they even stole the clothes off His back. Because fortunately for us, He didn't set His sights as low as that - He was after something so much more; so much better. Jesus wasn't chasing the glory of this world - it was the glory of God that He focused on. There was a much bigger, eternal, glorious picture that His eyes were set on and in order to realise that picture, He sacrificed His life in the short term - and what a sacrifice!

This is the upside down perspective on faith that I believe He calls us to - not a 'me' centred faith but a 'Christ' centred faith and if we truly, truly, truly want to lay hold of the huge faith; the mighty faith; the powerful faith that Jesus spoke of, we can only do it one way - on His terms and not on ours. See, anything else is but a cheap imitation. It may delight us for a short while but then it will come down to earth with a mighty thud. It always does!

If we would lay hold of a mighty mountain moving faith.....the faith of which Jesus spoke - if that's truly what we want, it's time in our life to lift up our eyes. It's time to raise our gaze. And I know no better way to do that than to take the God of the Bible at His Word.

To take it that what He says in His Word, the Bible, He actually means – I mean, actually. Not academically; not at a distance; not in a safe little Bible study group hedging around God’s Word kind of way – ‘Oh, I think it means this!’ ‘I think, well, I actually think it means that.’ ‘That’s nice. We had a pleasant evening. Would you like tea and coffee?’ ‘Oh, that’s good, let’s go home.’

Nooooo, that’s not what I mean! I mean that when we read something in God’s Word and it says it actually works, that we take this to mean that if we wrap our hearts around it and apply it in our lives and live it, that it will actually work in our lives. That’s what I mean! And that’s exactly what I would ask you to do with this beautiful and powerful Psalm – Psalm 121. If you have a Bible, open it up, go to Psalm 121 – have a read with me.

*“I lift up my eyes to the hills - from where will my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord; the Lord who made heaven and
earth.*

*He will not let your foot be moved; He who keeps you will not
slumber.*

He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

*The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.*

*The Lord will keep you from all evil; He will keep your life.
The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time
on and evermore.”*

Have you ever been at a complete loss at what to do? A curve ball comes at you right out of nowhere at a hundred miles an hour.....‘A...n...now what? What am I going to do? Where can I turn?’ And what do we do? My hunch is we’ve all done this....is that we tend to look off in the distance – to the furthest point that you can see on the horizon - and you can just see the writer of this Psalm going through one of those things in his life that knocks the stuffing out of him; casting his eyes up to the hills, wondering where his help is going to come from.

Remember back then, false gods, false idols – their temples were up on hill tops. Where will my help come from? The hill tops? The things of this world that I can touch and see and feel? No, because I know that when the chips are really down, they don’t have the power to help me. How many of us stop there, at the hill tops; wondering, worrying? That’s the place of fear, but the Psalmist, he

doesn't stop there – he goes further, much further. "My *help*," he says, "*my help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.*"

The hills - why they're nothing! No, no, my help comes from the Lord; the God who made the hills and not just them, the whole earth – every mountain, every valley, every ocean and not just the earth, but the heavens too – the vastness of the universe. That's where my help comes from – the God who made the whole shootin' match – the eternal, powerful, mighty God. How stupid would it be just to stop at the hills?

Do you hear something? Do you hear the Spirit of God crying out to us through this Psalm? Lift up your eyes! This is a cry to those caught up in short termism. This is a cry to those who are stumbling around in the dark, looking down at their feet; down in that miry swamp of...of self. We have even forgotten that we can lift up our eyes to the One who has the power and the love and the desire and the faithfulness to make a difference. Not just the power, you see, but the will.

Read the rest of that Psalm again, doesn't it speak of a faithful God; a loving God; a God who remains so rock solid when everything else is crumbling, including us. A God who is awake and at work when we are asleep. A God who will keep us – you and me – for ever more. A God with both the will and the way. A God whose faithfulness is deserving of our faith.

Let me ask you this – where does your help come from? When one of those great big ugly things blocks your way and grips your heart with fear, where do you expect your help to come from? See, this is crunch time for faith – we can go through all the wonderful, good things in life and say, 'Yea, I have faith!' But it's when there is a dirty great mountain in our road; when our finances collapse; when the world markets collapse; when our health collapses; when a relationship collapses; when there's an obstacle we just can't seem to get through – Jesus said, 'You know what – all you need is just faith the size of a little mustard seed. "*If you believe in your heart that what you say will come to pass, you can say to this mountain, "Get up, move over there and jump in the lake," and it will be done for you.*"

Do you notice something? Jesus doesn't demand huge faith – He just demands faith the size of a mustard seed; an itsy, bitsy, teny, weny, little bit of faith and a huge, massive, powerful, omnipresent, all knowing God.

That's what faith is about!

