

Luke 17:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.

Analysis

Jesus teaches about faith: 'And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.' The disciples requested increased faith (v. 5). Jesus responds that even 'faith as a grain of mustard seed' (πίστιν ὡς κόκκον σινάπεως, pistin hōs kokkon sinapeōs)—proverbially the smallest seed—suffices for impossible tasks. The example: commanding 'this sycamine tree' (τῇ συκαμίνῳ ταύτῃ, tē sykaminō tautē)—a hardy tree with deep roots—'be plucked up... and planted in the sea' (Ἐκριζώθητι καὶ φυτεύθητι ἐν τῇ θαλάσσῃ, Ekrizōthēti kai phyteuthēti en tē thalassē), 'and it should obey you' (ὑπῆκουσεν ἀν ὑμῖν, hypēkousen an hymin). The issue isn't quantity but quality—genuine faith, however small, accesses God's unlimited power.

Historical Context

The mustard seed metaphor appears throughout Jesus' teaching (Matthew 13:31-32, 17:20). The point isn't faith's size but its reality—even tiny genuine faith accomplishes what seems impossible because it connects to God's omnipotence. The sycamine tree (often identified with the black mulberry) had deep, strong roots, making transplanting extremely difficult. That Jesus specifies not just uprooting but replanting in the sea emphasizes the impossibility. Yet faith makes

impossible things happen—not because faith itself has power but because faith accesses God's power. This teaching challenges both presumption (demanding God perform according to our wishes) and despair (thinking nothing can change). Even weak faith in an almighty God moves mountains.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What's the difference between faith's quantity and quality, and why does quality matter more?
2. How does genuine faith, even when weak, access God's unlimited power?
3. What 'impossible' situations in your life need even mustard-seed faith applied to them?

Interlinear Text

εἰπεν δὲ ὁ κύριος Εἰ εἴχετε πίστιν ὡς κόκκον
said And G3588 the Lord If ye had faith as a grain
G2036 G1161 G2962 G1487 G2192 G4102 G5613 G2848

σινάπεως ἐλέγετε ἀν τῇ συκαμίνῳ ταύτῃ
of mustard seed say it should G3588 sycamine G3778
G4615 G3004 G302 G4807

Ἐκριζώθητι καὶ φυτεύθητι ἐν τῇ θαλάσσῃ·
tree Be thou plucked up by the root and be thou planted in the sea
G1610 G2532 G5452 G1722 G3588 G2281

καὶ ὑπήκουσεν ἀν ὑμῖν
and obey it should you
G2532 G5219 G302 G5213

Additional Cross-References

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

Matthew 21:21 (Faith): Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.

Mark 9:23 (Faith): Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.

Luke 13:19 (Parallel theme): It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.

1 Corinthians 13:2 (Faith): And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

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