

ECHO CHURCH
No Games. No Gimmicks. Just God.

Authorized but Unable

When authority meets a mountain it cannot move

Worship & Word | Year 1, Month 9, Week 4

Sunday, September 27, 2026

THE ANCHOR TEXT

Matthew 17:14 through 21 NKJV

"And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him. Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me. And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour."

"Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, Why could we not cast it out? So Jesus said to them, Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, Move from here to there, and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

THE HEART OF IT

The mountain did not expose the absence of their authority. It exposed the weakness of their dependence.

Being authorized by God is not the same as having learned to depend on God.

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 17:14 through 21 hits differently when we remember where Jesus has just been. He, Peter, James, and John are coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration. On that mountain there was glory. There was revelation. Moses and Elijah appeared, and the voice of the Father spoke from the cloud. At the bottom of the mountain there is a desperate father, a suffering son, nine frustrated disciples, arguing scribes, and a watching crowd. That contrast is the doorway into this passage. The real test of an encounter with God is often what happens when you come down from the mountain.

Encounters reveal who God is. Everyday environments reveal whether we have learned how to trust Him. The disciples had already been given authority, and still they met something they could not move. That is the uncomfortable lesson in this text. Being authorized by God does not automatically mean we have learned to operate consistently in what He authorized us to do.

This is what happens after Sunday. You can worship with everything in you, hear God clearly, and leave strengthened in prayer. Then Monday introduces you to something that is not impressed by what happened to you on Sunday. The mountain says, God is powerful. The valley asks, do you know how to walk in what you experienced?

MOVEMENT ONE: DO NOT CONFUSE PUBLIC DIFFICULTY WITH DIVINE DISQUALIFICATION

Matthew 17:15 through 16 NKJV

"Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him."

The father did exactly what made sense. These men represented Jesus. They had traveled with Him and watched Him work. Most importantly, Jesus had already authorized them. In Matthew 10:1 He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness. So this is not a story about disciples who lacked permission. They had authority. And still, they could not. The Greek verb speaks of inability. They did not refuse. They attempted something they had already been empowered to do, and they met resistance.

Remember who was standing there. Peter, James, and John were up on the mountain. The nine who failed were the ones left at the bottom, operating on what they had done before. That gives us a sobering distinction: authority is not the same thing as maturity in the use of authority. You can be called and still need development. You can be gifted and still need formation. You can be authorized and still discover places where your dependence on God has grown thin.

Then the crowd makes it worse. They try and nothing happens. They try again and nothing happens. The father is watching. The boy is suffering. The scribes are questioning. There is a particular pressure that comes when something you believe God called you to do is not working in front of people. That is where many believers begin doubting the assignment. Maybe God did not call me. Maybe I misunderstood. But their failure did not mean their authority had been revoked. It exposed something that still needed development. A moment of inability does not prove an absence of calling.

Do not let a crowd interpret your calling.

You can be called and confused. Anointed and developing. Authorized and still learning. Jesus did not revoke the disciples' assignment. He corrected their dependence.

MOVEMENT TWO: STOP DISGUIISING UNBELIEF AS HUMILITY

Matthew 17:17 NKJV

"Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me."

This language is severe because it is covenant language. Faithless and perverse generation echoes Moses in Deuteronomy 32:5. How long shall I bear with you sounds like the Lord speaking to Moses in Numbers 14:11 after the spies came back from Canaan. Jesus is not frustrated only because one

miracle failed. His words sweep across the whole scene: the crowd, the arguing scribes, the father, and the disciples. Everyone in that valley is standing where Israel stood at Kadesh, looking at the obstacle instead of the God who had already proven Himself.

That is why unbelief should never be reduced to atheism. You can believe in God and still function as though everything depends on you. You can believe God is powerful and still lean on your own experience. You can have yesterday's testimony and today's self reliance. The father models the alternative. He begins, Lord, have mercy. He does not come with entitlement. He comes with dependence. And that matters, because humility and unbelief are not the same thing.

Humility says, I cannot do this without God. Unbelief says, because I cannot see how God will do this, maybe God cannot do it. Humility admits your limitation and still trusts God's capacity. Unbelief takes your limitation and quietly projects it onto God. Sometimes we call something humility when it is really unbelief. I do not want to get my hopes up. I am probably not qualified. Maybe I should not expect too much. It all sounds humble. But humility never makes God smaller so that we can feel safer.

Humility never questions God's ability. It questions our independence.

Let your prayer change from God, am I really capable, to God, teach me how to depend on You for what You already authorized me to do.

MOVEMENT THREE: MEASURE THE MOUNTAIN BY YOUR GOD, NOT YOUR FAITH BY THE MOUNTAIN

Matthew 17:19 through 21 NKJV

"Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, Why could we not cast it out? So Jesus said to them, Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, Move from here to there, and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

I respect the disciples here, because they ask the right question. They could have blamed the boy, the father, the crowd, or the atmosphere. Instead they came to Jesus privately and asked, why could we not. That is the posture of a disciple. Public failure drove them into private conversation. There are seasons when the most mature question you can ask is, Lord, why am I struggling to do what You clearly told me I could do? Not why is everybody against me, but what needs to be developed in me. That is not condemnation. That is discipleship.

Then Jesus brings in the mustard seed, and this is where we often misread Him. He is not praising tiny faith, as if the lesson were you barely need to believe. The mustard seed is an image of faith that is genuine and alive. Something can start small and still carry life. Then He sets the seed beside a mountain, the smallest thing in their imagination against the largest thing in their landscape. And do not miss where they are standing. When Jesus says this mountain, they are at the foot of the one they just came down from.

So the question is not how big is your faith. The question is what is your faith connected to. Faith does not draw its power from emotional intensity. It draws its power from the God it trusts. Here is where we get it backward. We stare at the mountain until the mountain sets the size of our faith.

Jesus teaches us to let God set the size of the mountain. The mountain says, look how big I am. Faith says, look at Who sent me. Mustard seed faith does not deny that the mountain exists. It simply refuses to let the mountain be sovereign.

Then comes verse 21. This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting. Prayer is not a formula. Fasting is not currency we spend to buy more power. Both confront self reliance. Prayer says, God, I need You. Fasting says, my appetites do not control me. Notice Jesus did not stop to pray or fast before He healed the boy. This is not about a ritual performed in the moment. It is about a life lived in communion. The disciples' deeper problem was that they had started operating on delegated authority without maintaining dependent communion.

You do not need faith as large as your mountain. You need genuine faith in the God who stands above your mountain.

Sometimes the greatest enemy of your next level of dependence is your last level of success.

CLOSING

Matthew 17 leaves every believer facing one searching question. What happens when you know you have authority, you know you have an assignment, you know you have encountered God, and the thing in front of you still will not move? You do not throw away your assignment. You do not perform harder for the crowd. You do not pretend the mountain is not there. You return to dependence.

- Do Not Confuse Public Difficulty With Divine Disqualification. A moment of inability does not prove an absence of calling.
- Stop Disguising Unbelief As Humility. Humility lowers your dependence on yourself, never your expectation of God.
- Measure the Mountain By Your God. Small faith in a great God moves what great effort could not.

Sometimes God allows us to face something our talent, experience, title, gifting, knowledge, and previous victories cannot move, so that we rediscover the posture spiritual authority was always meant to operate from: God, I cannot do this without You.

A CLOSING WORD

Authority tells you what God said you could do. Dependence is what keeps you able to do it. Do not let the gift outgrow your grip on the Giver.

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