

THE PRAYER OF FAITH

Mark 11:20-26

Remember that as we began Mark chapter 11 we have stepped into the final week of Jesus' life before His death on the cross. On Palm Sunday He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey to the cheers and praises of many people. They proclaimed that He was the promised messiah, the King of Israel. Jesus went to the temple that day, looked around at everything, and then returned to Bethany to spend the night. On Monday morning, as Jesus and His disciples walked toward Jerusalem, Jesus cursed a fruitless fig tree, 11:12-14. He then went into the city and cleared out the temple in a symbolic prophecy of its coming judgment. When they passed by the next day, the disciples saw that the fig tree was dried up. Jesus uses this experience to teach His disciples a lesson about faith and prayer. Listen to His teaching in Mark 11:20-26:

20 Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.

21 And Peter, remembering, said to Him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away."

22 So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God.

23 For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.

24 Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

25 "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.

26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

Apparently, according to Matthew's account of this story (Matthew 21:20-22), the process of withering began to occur immediately upon Jesus cursing it. And the withering of the tree progressed, and spread all the way throughout the tree. By the end of a twenty-four hour period, the tree was completely withered, all the way down to the roots. It had become as completely dead as it was worthless.

The disciples are amazed, and Peter asks the Lord about it. Behind Peter's words, was an implied question. The question, as he looked upon the withered tree, was not, "Lord, why did this happen?" We answered that question last week. The reason why it happened was because it was a deceptive tree that promised fruit but delivered nothing, just like the fruitless temple in Jerusalem and the empty Jewish religious system--they too would be judged for their barrenness. So Jesus cursed it as an object lesson for His disciples.

But the real question for Peter was, "Lord, how could this happen?" As Matthew has it, Peter says, "**How did the fig tree wither away so soon?**" (Matthew 21:20). And that's when Jesus uses this tree as an object lesson in the power of prayer.

When Jesus spoke these words, He was close to Jerusalem; and He may have been pointing at the most prominent high-spot in that area, the Mount of Olives. I have never been there; but I understand that, from the highest vantage point of the Mount of Olives, you can look down upon the Dead Sea, which is the deepest impression on the surface of the earth. If that mountain were to be uprooted and cast into that sea, it would completely disappear under the water. Imagine your or my prayers having such power that they could command such a mountain to be removed and cast into such a sea!

There's much here to encourage our confidence in the power of prayer. When we exercise biblical faith in God and His promises, we can expect amazing results. The key to that statement is the phrase "biblical faith". A lot of people think that faith is a blank check. They believe they can ask for anything they desire and that God is obligated to do all they ask Him to. That is not exactly what the Bible teaches.

Here Jesus teaches some of the things necessary for mountain moving prayer.

I. The Command: Might Prayer Requires Faith in God v. 22

When the disciples are amazed at the withered fig tree, Jesus simply says, "**Have faith in God.**" How simple this is. Only four words—"Have faith in God"—yet how revolutionary they are.

Now the point here is not about faith. It's about God. It's not the nature of faith here that is the issue. It's the character of God that is the issue. Another way to say it is, "Trust God." If you want to have an effective prayer life, you must trust God. You must trust His power, but you also must trust His purpose and His promise and His plans and His will.

The emphasis of that command is that God people should have a deep-settled, consistent, ongoing confidence in Who God is; what God has said; and what God will do. It speaks of a constant communion of prayer with God, dependence upon God, and obedience to God. When Jesus says "have faith in God", He is encouraging faith in several aspects of God's character.

A. In God's Person – If you are saved, God is your Father. As your Father, He cares about every need in your life, 1 Pet. 5:7, "**casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.**" As your Father He invites you to bring your needs, burdens and concerns to Him, Heb. 4:16, "**Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**" As your Father He desires to open the resources of His kingdom and give them to you, Luke 12:32, .

We are not dealing with an aloof, disconnected deity without compassion and care for His people. Our God loves His children and He wants them to come to

Him on the basis of simple, childlike faith. Like a child trusts its parents for every need, the child of God can trust the Heavenly Father.

B. In God's Promises – When it comes to the matter of faith and approaching God in prayer, the people of God have some very precious promises. God honors faith, but genuine, biblical faith is always based on the Word of God! Always!

C. In God's Power –He has the ability to do anything He pleases to do. We serve an awesome God Who possesses all power in Heaven and earth, Matt. 28:18; Eph. 3:20;

D. In God's Purposes – When it comes to faith in God we must always remember that He has an eternal plan that He is working to accomplish. He has a purpose, and everything in the universe, even our requests, are subject to His will. He will do nothing that is outside the bounds of His eternal purpose. He will do nothing that is not part of His plan. He will not do everything we ask, just because we ask it. He will do those things that He wills to do, and He will accomplish all things that He has willed to do.

A lot of people believe that they can ask for anything they want, and that God has to do what they want Him to do. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Prayer is never about getting what we want from Heaven. Prayer is always about aligning our will with God's will so that His will is done on earth.

The Lord understands our cries. He understands the cry for healing. He understands the cry for a better marriage. He understands the cry of the heart over the children that grieve You and just torture You with their disaffection and their rebellion. He understands that. He understands the struggles with money and finances and He understands all that. He understands all that and He holds you in His heart and He will never forsake You and He will never withhold any good thing from you and all things will work together for your good if you faithfully ask.

But at the end, you can pour out your heart to Him, you can storm heaven but always with this qualifying statement, "Nevertheless, not my will, but Your be done." Why? His will is greater, purer, wiser, more generous, more gracious, more merciful than anything you can ever, ever imagine.

II. The Example: The Extent of Mighty Prayer (v. 23)

For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.

First, notice that the unlimited potential of prayer is extended to any person who has submitted faith in God's almighty power. Jesus says, "**whoever**". The power of prayer doesn't depend the least bit on the power or resources of the person praying; but only and utterly on the power and resources of the God to whom we pray.

To cast a mountain into the sea seems impossible. Mighty prayer Allows Us To Believe The Impossible. Jesus was using a familiar Jewish proverb to teach them a deeply spiritual truth. The Jews commonly spoke of moving a mountain to refer to something that was absolutely impossible, or to something that would be a long task.

There are so many situations in life that appear hopeless. There are people that seem so lost that they will never be saved. There are needs so great that it appears they will never be met. There are problems so big it appears they will never be overcome.

Faith in God, and in the promises found in His Word, allows us to believe God in the impossible situations of life. I can believe God for the salvation of that lost soul because of what He said in His Word, 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4. I can have faith that God will meet that need which seems impossible, because that is His promise, Matt. 6:25-34; Phil. 4:19. I can have faith that I am saved, Rom. 10:13; 10:9. I can have faith that I am secure in Jesus, John 6:37; 10:28. I can have faith in a place called Heaven, John 14:1-3. I can have faith that He will never leave me alone, Heb. 13:5.

The list could go on and on. Faith in God and His promises allows us to believe Him for those things that appear impossible to us!

Thank God for the power of genuine, biblical faith! Some people here are holding the unseen things of tomorrow in your hands today through the awesome power of faith. God has confirmed His promises in your heart and you are merely waiting for Him to fulfill them all in His time! Others don't believe it, but God has assured you through faith. Trust Him friend! Hold onto His promise and in His time, He will bring it to pass!

III. The Application: The Obstacles to Might Prayer

While Jesus points out the great Object of faith and reminds of the Opportunities of faith. He also mentions some Obstacles to faith. While faith in God is powerful and allows us to experience the incredible and receive the impossible, that faith can be hindered. There are many other obstacles to prayer in the Bible, that are not mentioned, but I want to focus on the three that are mentioned here.

A. v. 23 Unbelief – “and shall not doubt in his heart” – Doubt is deadly to effective prayer. The word “doubt” means “to be divided in ones thinking; to hesitate; to draw back”.

When we pray from a heart of doubt, we are drawing back from the Word of God. We are saying, “I know what God said, but I do not believe it in this matter.” Doubt calls into question to character and ability of God. Doubt says, “God may have promised it, but I don't believe He can or will do it.” The prayer of the doubter will not be answered, James 1:6-7.

24 Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

Jesus said, "**believe that you receive them, and you will have them.**"

Believing in advance is like a young couple who puts up a nursery even before the wife is pregnant. Or it's like a "hope chest" prepared by a young lady for the day she will be married. It's like buying a Christmas present in September but hiding it until December. We hide the presents in the closet and then get them out when Christmas draws near. You can't give the presents early or it will spoil the joy. In prayer our part is to trust God completely while we wait for the answers to come. "If your Father wants you to have it, it may not be in your hands, but it's already in the closet."

B. v. 23-24 Selfishness – "whatever things you ask when you pray" – The word "**pray**" means "to ask, to beg, to call for, to request". It sounds like a blank check. It sounds like you can ask for anything and receive it. I would just remind you that this verse says no such thing!

There is not a single verse in the Bible that contradicts any other verse. The Bible is very clear that answers to prayer come when we pray according to the will of God. 1 John 5:14-15, "**And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he hears us: And if we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.**"

Prayer must always be based on what He wants and not what we want. Ill. John 14:13-14, "**And whatever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.**"

When we pray "in Jesus' name" we are not using a magic formula that guarantees God has to do what we ask Him to. We are not just to close our prayers by saying "in Jesus' name" and then believe that God has to do what we tell Him to do.

To use Jesus' name is to pray for the things Jesus Himself would pray for. It is to pray for His purposes and will to be fulfilled, and not for our own selfish reasons. It is to petition God on the basis of Christ's righteousness and not our own. It is to pray for His glory alone. (Ill. Matt. 6:9-10.)

When we pray selfish prayers that are based solely on what we want in a situation and not on His will, we can expect those prayers to be unanswered. James 4:3, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."

C. v. 25-26 Unforgiveness – Jesus commands His disciples to forgive those who have wronged them. Just as faith connects us to God and enables our prayers to get through, unforgiveness stands as a barrier between us and the Lord.

An unforgiving spirit puts us at odds with the Lord. He has forgiven us of all sin, and He expects us to forgive others of their sins against us, Eph. 4:32. When we possess an unforgiving spirit, our prayers will be hindered and God's forgiveness

will not be realized in our daily walk. In other words, we will walk through this life out of God's will and out of touch with God. That is a terrible thing!

Let's wrap up this message with a simple application. Writing on this text over 150 years ago, Charles Simeon commented that no prayer offered in faith can ever fail. Sometimes God answers exactly as we have prayed. Often his answers come in a different fashion. Sometimes the answers are delayed for reasons we can't fully understand. And sometimes he substitutes something better in place of what we prayed for. And sometimes he gives us grace to bear what we asked might be removed from our lives. Yet in all this, God still answers prayer. God always answers believing prayer. Always!

RAY Pritchard told the story about a church in the Great Smoky Mountains that built a sanctuary on a piece of land donated by a member. It turned out that the sanctuary was so large that the building inspector would not give the church a certificate of occupancy because they lacked sufficient parking. Evidently the new building took up all the available space. The only unused part of the property was a mountain adjacent to the sanctuary. The Sunday before the new sanctuary was to open, the pastor called for those who believed that God could still move mountains to come to a prayer meeting that night. Out of a congregation of 300, 24 people showed up. After they had prayed for 3 hours, the pastor said he believed that somehow God would remove the mountain and pave the area in the next seven days.

The next day a man knocked on the pastor's door. He turned out to be a building contractor from a nearby county. They were building a shopping mall, he said, and needed some fill dirt in order to level the construction site. Could his company buy the mountain behind the church? He added that if they could have the mountain immediately, they would be glad to pay for paving and striping the new parking lot. The pastor readily agreed, and the new sanctuary opened on schedule the next Sunday. The person who wrote the story commented that there were far more members with "mountain-moving faith" that Sunday than there were the previous Sunday.

In light of what we have heard today, how's your prayer life? Are you walking in faith, believing God for the unseen? Are you looking to Him to move some big mountains in your life? Are you seeking His will for every situation you face? If that describes you, keep praying, keep trusting; in His time, He will bring it to pass in your life!

Have you been demanding your way from the Lord? You need to come and humble yourself to His will in that situation. Trust Him to do what is right, because that is exactly what He will do!

Do you have a mountain that needs to be moved? Come and talk to Him about it!

Do you need to be saved? Come to Jesus and ask Him, He will not turn you away!