

66 Mark 11:12-25

Passion for Prayer

Text

As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. 21 And Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.” 22 And Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God. 23 Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

Introduction

We are resuming our study in the book of Mark, and we are in the middle of the last phase of Jesus' ministry - his Jerusalem ministry. This new phase began when Jesus came in riding on a donkey. All the people were shouting Hosanna! Hosanna! They were waving palm branches and laying their coats before him. There were many OT kingly allusions wrapped up in that event. That got the attention of the religious leaders. Jesus was forcing the issue here. It was all coming to a head.

He entered into the temple and began to look around. He then departed Jerusalem, as it seems was his custom, and went out to Bethany. God is done with the temple and Jerusalem, he is done with the old economy. A new age has dawned. The fullness of time has come and it is the time of the new covenant. Jesus only comes into Jerusalem to do his business, but he refuses to stay there.

He comes back in the following morning and observes a fig tree in leaf. It was not the season for figs, but Jesus goes to it anyway. He intends to act out a parable as the OT prophets often did. Seeing the tree in full leaf but without any fruit he curses it. The fig tree is a sign of Israel, it was a national emblem. The cursing of the fruitless tree was filled with significance. Jesus proceeds on from there to the temple itself for another display. He clears the temple in fulfillment of scripture. The act of clearing the temple along with the prophetic utterances he cited indicated that this was more than a cleansing, this was a sign of the end.

That passage ended last week with "the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him." How masterfully Jesus is orchestrating the whole thing. The fullness of time has come. It is time for the new covenant to be inaugurated. We learn from Hebrews (ch 9) that Jesus blood was what ratified the new covenant. Thus as Jesus predicts the end of the temple, he does so in such a way that the eventual action of the scribes and chief priests is what

will actually usher in the new covenant. Their attempts to keep the old way is what brings the new age into being.

A New House of Prayer

20 As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. 21 And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." 22 And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God."

This episode begins with Peter's amazement at the fulfillment of Christ's curse. R.T. France notes that these verses, "are not an alien intrusion into this context, for the imminent loss of the house of prayer in Jerusalem (v 17) poses the urgent question of where the tradition of prayer is then to continue." (France, 448). This is still very much in the context of the end. There is even more on this subject that we will see in the following weeks. Having signaled an end to that which was designed to be a house of prayer, then wherein shall the tradition of prayer continue? And so Jesus replies, "Have faith in God."

Do not set your hope in that temple. Do not set your hope in circumcision. Do not set your hope on the sacrifices. Do not go to the temple and say, "We are delivered!" No! Have faith in God. God himself is your deliverer. God himself is your savior! Have faith in God. Peter is amazed that the tree has withered. And if this amazes him, how astounded will he be when Jesus explicitly predicts that not one stone of Herod's temple will be left on another! How shocked will everyone be when it actually comes to pass! Have faith in God!

Jesus is the new temple. In Matthew 12:6 Jesus says, "I tell you, something greater than the temple is here." Jesus is the new house of prayer. It is now through him that we have access to God. Do you ever wonder why we pray in Jesus name? It is so standard for us to end our prayers that way, "In Jesus' name amen." But why do you do it? People never prayed in the name of Moses in the OT. They didn't pray in anybody's name. What changed? Why do we do it? In the OT, the people had no right to come into the presence of God. So they always interacted with God through a mediator. The temple and the priests were the place and the people through which the people could come to God. I have some news for you. You have no right to enter into the presence of God anymore than the people in the OT did. You also need a mediator. Jesus is it. We do not come to God asking for this or that on our own merit. We come only through the person and work of Christ. If we entered into the presence of God on our own authority, we would be consumed. Only when we approach under the authority of Jesus will we be received. Thus in acknowledgment of our dependence on Jesus, we pray "in Jesus name."

John 14:13-14 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

John 16:23-26 In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. 24 Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. 25 "I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to

you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. 26 In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; These passages are clear markers for how we are to pray. It must be done in his name. Now as we look at each of these passages, we see that they are remarkably similar to what we have in today's passage.

Of Faith & Prayer

22 And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. 23 Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

We cannot read passages like these in today's world and not become a bit squeamish. These verses have been so abused and co-opted by the health-and-wealth, name-it-and-claim-it crowds, that it colors the way we read the text. We tend to read it with a sense of apprehension rather than exhilarating freedom as surely it was designed to be.

"God did not create the world out of nothing, He used the Force of His Faith." "God cannot do anything for you apart or separate from faith." "God used words when he created the heaven and the earth . . . Each time God spoke, he released his faith." -

Kenneth Copeland

Say to your body, "You're whole body! Why, you just function so beautifully and so well. Why, body, you never have any problems. You're a strong healthy body." Or speak to your leg, or speak to your foot, or speak to your neck or speak to your back; and once you have spoken and believe that you have received, and don't go back on it. Speak to your wife, speak to your husband, speak to your circumstances; and speak faith to them to create in them and God will create what you are speaking. - **Marilyn Hickey**

Faith filled words brought the universe into being, and faith filled-words are still ruling the universe today." - **E.W. Kenyon**

If you have a problem, any kind of need, housing, transportation, situation in marriage, you can release the creative - see it all works by faith - the creative force of God into existence." **Robert Tilton**

It would help you get faith down in your spirit to say out loud, 'Faith in my faith' keep saying it until it registers on your heart. **Copeland**

Unfortunately, there is no lack of this kind of nonsense. These so-called teachers grossly abuse these texts. This passage in Mark is one of their favorites. By way of correction, let us first note that Jesus says to have faith in God, not faith in faith. Faith does absolutely nothing. God does everything. Faith is not an entity or power source that you can plug into. Faith, quite simply, is just trusting in God. Scripture teaches that faith is the evidence of things hoped for. It is not, as these false teachers claim, a power source of its own. Nor is faith, as most atheists like to portray it, a belief in something without evidence. It is exactly the opposite of both of these. Faith is an evidence-based trusting in God.

This is why, again and again, stones of remembrance were set up. It is why feasts were enacted. It is why rituals were established. All these things and more are ways that people look back on the flawless track-record that God has and thereby trust in him. God is faithful, and history bears

this out. We trust in God because he is eminently trust-worthy!

The size of your faith is a bit beside the point. In Matthew Jesus speaks of this mountain-moving faith. Having descended the mount of transfiguration, he is confronted with a demon-possessed boy whom Jesus' disciples were unable to help. "And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" 20 He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."

At this point you may think that it is indeed the size of their faith that makes a difference. But observe closely. The analogy that Jesus uses hardly fits that point. You would expect him to say something to the effect of, "You have such little faith; if you had faith the size of an elephant, then you could say to this mountain, 'move from here to there' and it would obey." Instead of offering an analogy that makes big faith do big things, Jesus finds the smallest thing that the people are familiar with - the mustard seed. Great mountain-moving faith is tiny! It is not the size of the faith per se. So what is the problem?

Their faith was deficient, but not because they needed more of the same kind of faith. We examined this same account earlier in Mark. We are given another piece of the conversation in Mark 9:28-29, "And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, 'Why could we not cast it out?' 29 And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.'" The problem was not that the disciples had no confidence. As John MacArthur observes they had plenty of confidence, in fact they were surprised that they could not cast it out. But their confidence was in themselves. They tried to confront spiritual forces with their own authority. They never prayed to God. Their faith was deficient because they had faith in the wrong object. Even the tiniest faith - a mustard-sized faith - in an infinite God can move mountains. Have faith in God!

This brings us full circle to our text in Mark. This mountain-moving faith is a faith in God. Prayer to God trusting in God, could have cast out that demon.

23 Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

I know we have covered a lot of ground already, but please stick with me. We have noted that the temple is going to be destroyed, that is a broad theme. This begs the question wherein the tradition of prayer will then take place. We answered, "In Jesus." He is the new temple. You would not dream of trying to offer your own sacrifices apart from the temple and the altar and the mercy seat in the OT. And neither should we dream of approaching God with going through Jesus.

Thus, when Christ says that one "should not doubt in his heart, but believe that it will come to pass" how are we to be doubt-free? The Reformation study Bible note on this verse says it best: "Freedom from doubt arises from an awareness that something is truly God's will." (Reformation Study Bible text note). Since it is God in whom we are trusting, then our confidence, or freedom from doubt, will come from knowing that this is truly God's will. This is why we cannot separate these verses on faith and prayer from the concept of coming to God through Jesus. It is faith in God. Doubt is removed by assurance that the thing prayed for is God's will. This is why, again and again in scripture, the saints pray God's promises. Those are the things that we can trust in. Is

it God's will that your leg be better? Who knows? I have zero confidence that that is the case. Scripture says nothing about God's will for my foot. By confidence arises from a knowledge of God's will which knowledge, in turn, comes from a consistent, prayer-filled study of God's word.

Corporate Prayer

The final thing I want to note here is the emphasis on community prayer. Again, France states, "The communal aspect of prayer is evident from the fact that vv. 22 and 24-25 are expressed in the plural . . . prayer is here presented as something which the community of disciples undertakes together, not as a private transaction between the individual believer and God." (France, 448). This is further born out in (and helps clarify) the verse on forgiveness. Unity is important for efficacy in communal prayer. It is important to avoid broken relationships. I had anticipated this being the larger part of my sermon, but time has run out. I will address it briefly today and then perhaps fill it out a bit more next week.

All of this talk on prayer is usually taken on an individual level. But it seems that Jesus is here speaking more of corporate prayer. We have a terrible tendency to individualize things. "It's just me and Jesus." Well no! It is not just you and Jesus. Your wife exists too Your children exist too. I exist! It is not just you. Christianity was not designed to give us our own personal Jesus. We are made for community. We are joined together in one body. There is one faith, one Spirit, one hope. We are all members of the same body. We are all sheep in one flock. We are all stones, built one on top of another, in one temple. We are all branches in one vine. It is not just you and Jesus.

Corporate prayer was a regular part of OT life, and it continued to be a part of NT life. It is the kind of prayer life that we should emulate. Corporate Prayer causes one to look out, not merely for oneself, but also for the interest of others. When there is sin in another person's life, having a corporate understanding will help us avoid saying, "That's your problem" and instead to acknowledge, "This is our problem."

Our time is up, so I will pick up here next week.