

HAVE FAITH IN GOD

Mark 11:20-25

Key Verse: 11:22

“Have faith in God,’ Jesus answered.”

In today’s passage Jesus teaches us to have faith in God. When Peter was amazed by Jesus’ power to curse a fig tree, it was a teachable moment. Peter really wanted to learn something from Jesus, most likely how to curse a fig tree and make it wither overnight. Jesus taught him faith in God that moves mountains. We face many challenging issues, both within ourselves and without. These issues are more than we can handle by our own strength and wisdom. We really need faith in God. When we have it, we can overcome all kinds of hardships and live a victorious life. We become world changers who can reveal God’s glory. Jesus wants us to have faith in God. Let’s learn the faith he wants us to have, and how to express it.

First, have faith that is in God (20-22). Since Jesus had entered Jerusalem, many surprising things had happened: Jesus revealed himself as the Lord, claiming to be the owner of a donkey; Jesus entered Jerusalem as a king, riding on a donkey’s colt and receiving people’s welcome as the Messiah; Jesus cursed a fig tree when he did not find fruit on it; Jesus cleared the temple, driving out all the animals and merchants. These things had all happened within little more than a day. Now the religious leaders were planning to kill Jesus (18). It seemed that the disciples’ world turned upside down. They were shocked; they were fearful and confused; they felt powerless. The challenges and dangers before them looked like giant mountains. They really needed power in order to overcome these obstacles.

At this moment in the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots (20). Peter remembered and said to Jesus, **“Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!”** (21) He was really interested in the power of Jesus’ words. Perhaps he thought that with this kind of power, they could defeat all God’s enemies and establish the messianic kingdom. With such power, he could be a great leader. Even though he had a big mouth, his words did not have any power. As a top disciple, he wanted to give commands, telling others what to do. But no one listened. He wanted his words to have power, like Jesus’ words. Not only Peter, but all of the disciples had become ambitious in this way.

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How did Jesus help them? Let's read verse 22. **“Have faith in God,’ Jesus answered.”** What does it mean to have faith in God? Most of all, it means to depend on God alone. When Jesus called his disciples, they left everything behind to follow him. It was a decision of faith to put their lives in Jesus' hands. Jesus' purpose of calling was that they might be with him, and later be sent out to preach as independent gospel workers (Mk 3:14). As we survey Mark's gospel, we can find that Jesus trained them in various ways. Among their training topics was to learn to live by faith in God. Though they had faith to follow Jesus, they still needed practical training in faith.

When they were fearful in a storm at sea, Jesus calmed the storm and said, **“Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”** (Mk 4:40). It meant that in any situation, they should not be fearful, but have faith in God. Then Jesus showed them his power over demons, disease and even death, and that he would work on behalf of those who have faith in him (5:1-43). Jesus sent them out two by two to preach, heal and drive out demons. When they simply depended on Jesus, they experienced his power and were effective (6:12-13). Shortly after this, they wanted to send a crowd away to buy food for themselves. They did not yet share his compassion. Jesus said, **“You give them something to eat”** (6:37a). He taught them to bring what they had to him—five loaves of bread and two fish—and he used them to feed the crowd of five thousand people (6:42). It was training in practical faith to be shepherds of needy people. One time, nine disciples tried to drive out a demon from a boy and failed. Jesus said, **“Everything is possible for one who believes,”** and drove the demon out of the boy (9:23 ff.). Then he taught his disciples that they needed to pray (9:29). The disciples watched a rich young man reject Jesus' invitation to follow him, and walk away sad. They were shocked and asked, **“Who can be saved?”** Jesus said, **“With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God”** (10:27). In this way, Jesus had been teaching his disciples to have faith in God alone. In just a few days Jesus would leave them. Now it was time for them to depend on the God who sent Jesus as their source of power and strength.

Then, who is God? Our God is the Almighty Creator God. When he said, **“Let there be light,” there was light”** (Gen 1:3). All the darkness disappeared and bright light filled the whole universe. Our God is the source of life. He made man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being (Gen 2:7). Our God

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calls himself **“I Am Who I Am”** (Ex 3:14). He is Eternal Being. He has always existed; he exists now; he will always exist. No one can threaten his existence. He needs help from no one. Our God is also the compassionate Redeemer of mankind. He introduced himself to Moses, saying: **“The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving their wickedness, rebellion and sins”** (Ex 34:6b-7a). Our God is good all the time (Ps 100:5). God works for the good of those who love him in all things (Ro 8:28). God’s goodness and love are unfailing. This God sent Jesus into the world as the Savior of mankind. Through Jesus the disciples could know this God. Now it was time for them to depend on God alone.

When Jesus says, **“Have faith in God,”** he really wants us to grow in faith that depends on God alone. Sometimes we feel powerless, especially when we face challenging issues. When we see the increasing acceptance of same sex marriage, and the rapid expansion of pornography and corrupt entertainment, we feel that our nation is plunging down a pathway toward destruction. To become a shepherd nation and missionary-sending nation seems as difficult as moving a mountain. Terror activities by Muslim extremists are increasing in frequency. Just a few days ago, one extremist group, Boko Haram, wiped out most of the city of Baga, Nigeria, killing as many as 2,000 women, children and unarmed men. The Islamic State is threatening the beheading of Japanese people in a public display of terror. When we hear this kind of news, we can become angry and frustrated, or fearful and powerless. In raising student disciples of Christ, as well as our own children, we face so many obstacles—bad influences, the devil’s hindrances, and the power of sin. Our own strength is too puny to deal with these things. When we pray for world mission, including China and North Korea, it seems that we are trying to move a whole mountain range. On top of that, there are many kinds of temptations, sinful desires and bad habits within us. We are weak. We face many kinds of mountains. But God is mightier than all the things we may be facing. God is loving and good. God is the Sovereign Ruler. Our lives and our nation are in God’s hand. So all we need to do is to trust God. To us Jesus says, **“Have faith in God.”**

Second, faith that speaks and prays (23-25). After teaching his disciples to have faith in God, Jesus told them how to express it: through speaking words of faith and through prayer. First of all, they should speak words of faith. Jesus said, **“Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go throw**

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yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them.'" The mountain right before Jesus was the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, where corrupted religious leaders were active. It was where Jesus would be falsely accused, condemned, tortured, and finally killed on a cross. Yet, in this way, Jesus would move this mountain into the sea. Jesus became the temple. Jesus invalidated the old system, which did not work because of man's weakness, and opened a new and living way to God (Heb 10:20). Jesus threw the mountain of man's sin into the sea by the power of his blood. Jesus threw the power of death into the sea through his resurrection from the dead. Jesus crushed the head of Satan, winning everlasting victory over him.

Jesus did the great work. But he left it to his disciples to proclaim his victory to the world. He sent them first into Jerusalem (Ac 1:8). There, Peter stood up before those who had conspired against Jesus, and said, **"...you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead..."** (Ac 2:23-24). Peter challenged them to repent and save themselves from that corrupt generation. Three thousand people repented and believed in Jesus in one day (Ac 2:41). Later, when Peter and John entered the temple to pray, a crippled man begged them for money. Peter said, **"Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk"** (Ac 3:6). Then the man walked and went with them into the temple walking, jumping and praising God (Ac 3:8). When Peter depended on God alone, his words became powerful. He was no longer a man of big mouth, but of real spiritual authority. Jesus training of his disciples was not in vain. In his time, by the power of the Holy Spirit, they became bold men of faith who preached the gospel powerfully. Jesus wants us all to speak the gospel boldly in our homes, campuses, workplaces and neighborhoods. Let's express our faith by speaking the gospel into the darkness of our times.

There is a person for whom I have a tremendous respect in regards to his faith. When he evangelized American college students in obedience to the world mission command of Jesus, he faced giant mountains. But he was not daunted. He did not shrink back or give up. He depended on God alone and spoke God's words with power. Then God moved the mountains before him and worked to raise gospel preachers who are impacting America. Many people were influenced by his faith and challenged impossible situations and won great victories. As a result, the gospel spread all over the world. Now, as

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we face many challenging issues, we need this kind of faith. God said to Zerubbabel, **“Not by might or by power, but by my Spirit. What are you, mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground”** (Zech 4:6-7a). Let’s have faith in our mighty God and speak words of faith!

To speak God’s words in power, we must overcome something. In verse 23 Jesus said, **“... and does not doubt in his heart but believes....”** When we try to speak God’s words in power, strangely doubt arises in our hearts: “Will God’s word really work when I speak it?” “Will this Bible study really help my Bible student or my child?” “Can God’s words really change America into a shepherd nation?” We don’t try to doubt, but doubts just pop up. The more we struggle not to, the more doubts arise in us. Where does this doubt come from? It is not a psychological phenomenon; it is the devil’s work.

In Genesis 3, we see how the devil destroyed man’s happiness. He didn’t use automatic rifles or field artillery. Instead, he subtly distorted God’s word, and planted doubt about God’s love. He tried to portray God as a manipulator. It was not easy for the woman to discern the devil’s work; she fell into doubt and disobeyed God. Then her worldview changed from God-centered to self-centered. In fact, she was deceived and under Satan’s control. Here we should acknowledge that doubt is Satan’s powerful and deadly weapon. When we begin to doubt God’s word and God’s love, we become powerless. In order to speak God’s word with power, we need to engage in a spiritual battle against the devil’s doubt.

Another weapon in Satan’s arsenal is fear. When Adam disobeyed God’s word, fear was planted in his heart (Gen 3:8-10). Since then men have become slaves of fear. Satan constantly tries to plant fear in our hearts. When fear comes in, we become paralyzed. We should know who our real enemy is. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood. It is against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph 6:12). How can we overcome the doubt and fear that the devil plants? We need to have faith in God’s love. God demonstrated his love for us: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Ro 5:8). When God gave Jesus, he gave everything to us. At the lowest point of our lives, he gave the most costly grace to us freely out of his love. He who did not spare his own Son will graciously give us all things (Ro 8:32). God’s love is unconditional and perfect. This perfect love of God drives out fear and doubts from our hearts (1 Jn 4:19). Paul had this kind of faith and said, **“For I**

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am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Ro 8:38-39). He said that we are “more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Ro 8:37).

The disciples should also pray. Jesus said, **“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours”** (24). God the Almighty Creator, Sovereign Ruler, and our Heavenly Father, loves to hear us speak words of faith to him in prayer. When he hears words of faith, he rewards our prayer right away. But in order to speak these kinds of words to God, we must speak with the faith that God gives us. This is possible when our hearts are right with God. So prayer is the time to discover God’s heart, God’s desires and God’s prayer topics. When a blind man cried out to Jesus for mercy, Jesus was pleased to make him see. This man prayed with the right prayer topic. It was according to his real need and was used to reveal the glory of God. But if we ask with a wrong motive, God will not answer our prayer (Ja 4:3a). This may cause us to fall into doubt. One young man prayed for the recovery of a dying relative, but the person passed away. Then he doubted God in his heart and abandoned God. But during a critical accident, he cried out for God’s help, and God answered him. Then his relationship with God was restored. Prayer is a spiritual lifeline to God. So the Bible urges us to **“pray continually”** (1 Th 5:17). But let’s remember that in order to pray effectively, we should have a right motive and prayer topics (1 Jn 5:14-15).

Jesus continued in verse 25: **“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”** Prayer is related not only to having a right relationship with God, but also to having right relationships with others. When we pray, God wants us to forgive and be forgiven in order to receive his answer. When we sin against others, basically it is sin against God. In the parable of the prodigal son, the son confessed, **“Father I have sinned against heaven and against you”** (Lk 15:18). King David also realized that sin was ultimately against God and said, **“Against you, you only, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight”** (Ps 51:4). Here we learn that when we have an unforgiving heart, it is sin against God and this hinders our prayer. In order for our prayer to be heard, we must forgive anyone whom we

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hold anything against. When we do, we can receive God's forgiveness freely and know that he will answer our prayers.

But practically speaking, it is not easy to forgive others. Forgiving others is like moving a mountain. Actually, it is impossible by our own effort. It is only possible when we remember Jesus' grace of forgiveness for us at the cross. Jesus said, **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"** (Lk 23:34a). As Jesus forgives us, so we also must forgive others. One young man behaved violently in a Christian community and hurt many people. It became impossible for him to stay there, and he left. But he carried the stigma of being a dangerous person. He felt he was not forgiven and was distrusted and abandoned. So his mentor urged him to return to the church he had left and to reconcile. His mentor also urged the pastor of the church to forgive him unconditionally in order to develop a healthy community. The pastor struggled with this direction at first. How could he welcome a dangerous man? Then he happened to hear the testimony of a person who had been forgiven of a grievous sin by another. The power of forgiveness changed the forgiven person completely. The pastor realized that practicing this kind of forgiveness is most Christ-like. He decided to develop a culture of forgiveness to display the glory of God as a community.

In his book, "A Call to Spiritual Reformation," D.A. Carson remarked that many churches in America are active in carrying out programs, but do not produce the fruit of faith and prayer and forgiving love. He calls for American Christians to live by genuine faith in God and to grow deeper in the knowledge of God. What we really need is to have faith in God, speak God's word boldly, pray and practice forgiveness. Jesus said, **"Have faith in God."**