

Pray with a Forgiving Heart

Mark 11:19-26 (08/16/15)

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Never doubt the complete and total power and authority of Christ over every person and every thing in your life. He is in complete control, in total charge of everything that is happening as we enter the Passion Week. Nothing and nobody can touch Him until it's time! This is what amazes and thrills me as we dive into these events leading to the crucifixion. We'll see this morning that if you are one of His people, you are following the Winner, the Champion. You are not following a loser. You are on the victory side. And that's why Paul can face all the dangers and persecutions and enemies of the gospel and say with complete confidence, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me!" (Philippians 4:13). And in Romans 8 he announces, "If God be for you, who can be against you? We are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us!" (Romans 8:31,37)

This morning we get a good taste of Christ's authority and how we as His followers participate with Him in His rule and authority, especially through prayer. Remember, Jerusalem is teeming with upwards of one million or maybe more Jewish pilgrims from all over the world, gathering for the feast of Passover. Jesus has already come into the city as the Messiah with throngs of people crying out, "Hosanna in the highest!" The people thought He was going to immediately bring in the great kingdom promised by the prophets. But He doesn't. He has something completely different on His agenda, but they don't know what it is.

Last week Bryce painted for us that amazing picture of the fig-less fig tree, all leaves and show but no fruit, a picture of the apostate, godless nation of Israel. Christ cursed it, symbolic of the coming destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in AD 70. Let's take a quick scan of what happens next leading up to three powerful promises to faith and prayer:

Cleansing of the temple

Mark 11:15-17 Then they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; 16 and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. 17 And He began to teach and say to them, "Is it not written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS'? But you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN."

Jesus is absolutely fired up with righteous anger as He marches up to that 35-acre Temple Mount, enters the Court of the Gentiles, and becomes the Temple bouncer of the day. The whole place had been turned into a corrupt money-making scheme of charging Jews and Gentile proselytes outrageous prices for sacrificial animals, up-charging for exchanging coins qualified for the temple tax. A 25-cent pigeon was sold for \$4, like 25 cents worth of popcorn for \$4 at the movie theater! When a family brought their little lamb for sacrifice, the authorities informed them their lamb did not qualify and they would have to purchase an approved one over there. Jesus violently strode through this large area grabbing these greedy rip-offs and pushing them out, throwing over their tables with an awful clattering and thudding. Look at verse 17! He stands there and cries out, "This temple is to be a place for prayer for the Gentiles and you have turned it into a robbers' den!" Remember, He is untouchable as He does this. He is in complete control of the whole situation.

Confusion of the city

Mark 11:18 The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.

The masses of people who hear Him are completely spellbound! "Listen to Him, Levi! Have you ever heard or seen anything like it?" Luke 19:48 says, "All the people were hanging on to every word He said." Meanwhile, the rulers are filled with anger and fear of Him. "We've got to stop this Nazarene, but we can't

start a riot with this mass of people. What are we going to do?" They're going to do exactly what Christ has determined for them to do! But they don't know that.

Complete destruction of the fig tree.

Mark 11:19-20 When evening came, they would go out of the city. 20 As they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up.

Jesus and His men would return the two miles back to Bethany on the east side of the Mount of Olives and retire there for the evening. In the morning on their way back to the city they pass by that fig-less fig tree and Peter as well as the others are struck by one thing - the whole tree is completely withered! Not just on the tips but the whole thing is obviously worthless, dead. Fig trees can be pretty big. Think of a nice sized apple tree. What is going on here? Some think Jesus wasn't environmentally friendly by destroying this perfectly innocent fig tree. That's just plain ridiculous. He owns the universe and can do what He wants with it. But what does this mean and how did it happen? First, this is a picture of Jerusalem's coming complete and total destruction at the hands of the Romans in AD 70. We'll be seeing more of this later in Mark.

But the second thing this shows is Christ's absolute power over everything! And Jesus uses this obvious display of power to teach us three huge lessons about God's power available through prayer.

#1 Remember to whom you are praying – have faith in God.

Mark 11:21-22 Being reminded, Peter said to Him, "Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered." And Jesus answered saying to them, "Have faith in God."

Peter is wondering, "How did this happen?" Jesus: "Through faith in God." The first lesson on prayer is, believe that God is real, that He is personal, that He is powerful, that He is able to do great and mighty things. Get your sights above this world onto the true and living God. He's really there! Hebrews 11:7 says he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. If you don't believe He is real, that He is really there, forget it. You will never see God's power at work in your life. These rulers had no faith in God. They were godless and will pay very shortly.

What about you? Do you have faith in the true and living God? Do you believe He is really there when you pray to Him? Jesus says, "Believe in the God." Believe in the God who always was, who created all things, who is all powerful, who is sovereign over all things, who has revealed His will to us in His Word, who has made great and mighty promises that we need to receive and live on. Believe in God. Prayer is more than a psychological exercise to make us feel better.

#2 Remember how powerful your God is – He can move mountains.

Mark 11:23-24 "Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. 24 "Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.

Be careful here. This is not "Name it and claim it," or "Blab it and grab it." This is not fodder for the wealth, health, and prosperity hucksters lining their pockets with gullible and biblically ignorant people's seed money. Don't be thinking of Joel Osteen or Benny Hinn.

Christ is using the picture of a mountain to illustrate how great God's power is for His people. He's exaggerating to get a fantastic point across. Mountains represent impossible situations that humanly you can't move. No one can move mountains. But just as the power of God completely withered that tree, if you believe God, He is able to move mountains for you! God is a mountain moving God.

So He applies it in verse 24. He is fueling His men and us with that heart confidence in God and with that assurance that whatever we are going to face, God's power is an overcoming, mountain-moving power. So don't be afraid to ask God to move those mountains. You face something humanly impossible in your life and you know it isn't pleasing to God, but you haven't been able to conquer it. Take the power of God

with you in prayer. Your God is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that you can ask or think. God isn't limited by your weakness or by your circumstances.

God is a mountain-moving God. You may have mountains of habits that are really tough. Habits are really, really hard to change! But have faith in God and pray seeking God to move those mountains. To "believe you have received them" means you are serious about what you are asking, you are willing to meet any conditions for receiving them, and you are fully expecting that God is powerful and loving and wise and able to move that mountain.

Your marriage is in shambles. It is driving you to seek God with all your heart. And you want to see God rip up your mountain of stubbornness or resentment or that tough issue of living with a disobedient spouse, as 1 Peter 3:1-2. As a believer in Christ, with this counsel coming straight from Jesus, you can't say I just can't overcome this habit. I just can't conquer this thing. Jesus right here says, "You can't say that!"

The mountains God is able to remove are mainly mountains in your own heart. God is much more concerned about removing mountains in our hearts than He is about removing obstacles in our circumstances. If you believe God, that He is real, and you know His will revealed in the Bible, and you seriously ask Him for some really tough things you know He wants changed in your life, He is able to move that stubborn habit. Your marriage or parent-child relationship seems to be an impossible situation to you. You are struggling with pornography or mental impurity. The mountain may be that slippery appendage in your mouth that James 3 says no man can conquer, the tongue. But God can deal with that mountain. You may dread going back to school because people make fun of you and your stand for Jesus – this can be a big mountain for you. Ask God to help you with that. People are facing mountains of doubt, pride, some addicting habit. Christ is fueling our faith here to believe God and ask Him to root up that mountain.

Lots of mountains of unbelief are streaming into USI over the next days. Campus Outreach staff will be praying for God to move mountains of unbelief from freshman hearts. You can't change people, but God can, and He is able to rip up the mountains of unbelief and melt those mountains right down into the sea of mercy and grace and the gospel! We're looking at an exciting year ahead praying to a mountain-moving God who can do incredible things through each of us!

A huge mountain in many hearts is bitterness, hurt feelings, and anger at someone.

#3 Remember how richly God has forgiven you – forgive from your heart.

Mark 11:25 "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions."

Whenever you stand, or kneel, or sit, or lie down, or drive, or walk, or run, or talk (remember Nehemiah's flare prayer as he was talking to the king), or work – you can pray anytime. But Jesus is emphasizing something here that is absolutely essential for any kind of prayer life. You will not penetrate the heavens if your heart is holding bitterness or resentment or you are nursing hurts toward anyone. Notice, He emphasizes that "anything" against "anyone." No exceptions. Someone said something, did something, repeatedly did something to you, and you are dealing with a mountain of bitterness in your heart, and Jesus says you must be willing to forgive them. We don't earn God's forgiveness by forgiving, but Jesus is talking to believers here. If I as one of God's children am not willing to forgive others in my heart, my heavenly Father will not be listening to my prayers until I do.

There's good news. God knows how to remove mountains of bitterness. He does it through the gospel. Listen to this good news in Ephesians 4:31-32, "Let all (not some) bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

And this from Colossians 3:13, "Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you."

So you're there praying and into your mind pops this nasty thought about that person who said that thing or did that thing or has just been a real pain to you. You've been building up a resentful spirit against him and you can hardly look at him or her without feeling that bitterness stirring around inside. Listen folks, you must deal with that before going any further! Whether or not that person has repented, you must cultivate this forgiving spirit, forgiving heart. No Christian has the luxury of nursing a resentful spirit. You must remember the ton of forgiveness God has granted you, and in your heart you must say, "I'm not going to hold that person guilty against me." That's why 1 Peter 3:7 tells us husbands that we are to live with our wives in an understanding way, grant them honor as fellow heirs of God's grace, so that your prayers aren't hindered! If you aren't right with your spouse, you aren't right with God!

Be sure to understand the two aspects of forgiveness. Here in Mark 11 Jesus requires this attitude of forgiveness, forgiving in your heart. God says we must always have a forgiving heart attitude toward everyone, just like God does. Psalm 86:5 says He is ready to forgive. You have to sincerely say, "I hold no bitterness or anger against anyone."

But then there's the granting of forgiveness. Luke 17:3-4 says, "When your offender sins against you, reprove him, and when he repents, forgive him, even if he offends you seven times in one day." When someone sins against you and they don't repent, but you assure them you have forgiven them even as they continue in their sin without acknowledging it, you haven't helped them. Your goal in extending forgiveness is to help them with their sin.

Say your child calls you a name, "You're stupid." Now you have a forgiving heart toward him. You are eager and ready to forgive, but you don't say, "Don't worry about it; I forgive you, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz." No, you say, "Maher, come here. What did you just say to daddy? That was wrong, Bazy boy. You need to admit you were wrong and ask forgiveness. Were you wrong?" "Yes daddy, I was wrong for calling you a bad name. Please forgive me daddy." "Bazy boy, I forgive you completely! Now we need to work on showing honor to your mommy and daddy. You can't be calling people stupid, right?"

And when you give that gift of forgiveness to your offender, you are making a promise to do three things. You will not be using it against him in the future. You will not dwell on it yourself. And you will not share the offense as a prayer request at your next small group.

So What?

Do you believe God is really there? Feed deeply on His revelation to you.

Do you believe that God is powerful and able to remove those stubborn mountains in your life? Pray that God would show His awesome mountain-moving power in your life.

Are you harboring even the slightest resentment or bitterness against anyone? The gospel empowers you to forgive. If God has forgiven you tons, then you must be willing to forgive the ounce or two of offense against you. Will you? Pray, "Lord, I right here and now in my heart forgive that person who hurt me so badly. I refuse to nurse hurts anymore. And when he admits he was wrong, I will be quick to assure him I have forgiven him." And that will be the end of the matter.