

Faith that moves Mountains.
Mark 11:22-26

1 Chronicles 16:8-36

Hebrews 3

Responsive 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

So last week when we were looking at our passage here in Chapter 11 I ended up cutting off the last 5 verses of what I intended for us to read which is actually the 3rd part of the Markan sandwich, so in reality we didn't fully cover all of our passage last week that we were suppose to look at. But that is ok, we will just go through it today instead. I intended to spend a little bit of time this morning to wrap up where I left off last week but instead it turned into something intirely different. So today, instead of just wrapping up from last week, we will be focusing on the teaching of Jesus to his disciples here Mark 11:12-25.

As we talked about last week, this cursing of the barren fig tree just like all of Jesus other miracles pointed to a greater meaning. He did not curse this tree out of anger, or wrath as some scholars and philosophers like to think, but it was because of its deceit and emptiness, appearing to have fruit but being found to have none. That was the point of the message last week, that the greater message of this fig tree was the judgment of God against the temple, but not only the temple, but also false disciples. Now we know that the main point that Jesus was looking to teach his disciples here was that the temple had become corrupt, it has lost its purpose, and now has become unnecessary. Just like the fig tree, it has all the appearance and trappings of religion and bearing fruit but inside it is full of liars and thieves who were using it for their own glory and gain.

We also discussed last week that the temple's original purpose was to be a meeting place between God and man, and through the rituals, the sacrifices, and traditions truths about God were taught, and it was a foreshadow of the true promised sacrificial lamb who would come and once and for all take away the sin of God's people. So by the time that Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, not only has the temple been tainted, and defiled by greed and corruption it was also no longer necessary due to the one that the temple was an example of has arrived.

That just makes me think of the idea of the re-constructionist movement, the idea that Christians must work toward controlling the government so the laws of God can be reestablished in the land preparing for the returning of Christ is frankly quite offensive. For as we see throughout the new testament that it is Jesus and not the temple that comes and in whom is salvation, and God's children. Jesus even refers to himself as the true temple so there is no need to rebuild the temple, to reestablish the Jewish traditions and rituals for they have all been fulfilled in Christ. They were a tutor, just like the law, to teach about the Messiah to come, but now that he has come they have passed away, done, over, unnecessary. For God's salvific work which was foretold by prophets, taught in parables, and expressed through shadowy traditions has now been witnessed clearly on the cross.

Jesus cursed the unfruitful fig tree, drove out those who were buying and selling in the temple treating it like marketplace, and we see in verse 21 as Jesus and his disciples are once again leaving Jerusalem they pass by the tree and Peter remarks that the tree has withered away. Then in chapter 13 we see Jesus prophesy the destruction of the temple. So we now can see how all of these things have played out, but Jesus disciples were living it, they did not have the advantage that we do to understand all of these things, having the written word and the ability to see the larger picture that we are able to see today.

So when Jesus cursed the tree, and threw out the corrupt merchants out of the temple the disciples at that time did not understand the meaning. But as we can tell by Mark's writing and his structure of putting these events together that after Jesus' death and resurrection all of these things became clear.

So in the last 5 verses here that we did not end up looking at last week, which is the final side of this sandwich Jesus points to faith in God. After Peter remarks how the tree has withered, Jesus answers rather peculiarly. "Have faith in God" And then proceeds to instruct them on faith and prayer saying. "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. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses. "

So it would seem here that Jesus is teaching that we can have anything and everything we want as long as we ask for it in faith and believe that it will happen. This is where the charismatic's and the word faith people come to justify their belief system. But doing so, does not really make sense in the context of what is happening here, this passage does not just exist on its own but it is the culmination of the teaching of Jesus cursing the fig tree and throwing the merchants out of the temple. This is to show that the temple is nothing, the traditions, the rituals, the sacrifices are nothing and it is God that matters. To put it plainly Jesus is saying, You believe that the blood of bulls and lambs removes your sin? You believe that the temple practices make you right before God? I am telling you, that it is only by faith in God. And if you have faith in God, true believing faith then nothing is impossible with God. Remember the account of the rich young ruler who asked Jesus " what must I do to inherit eternal life"

Relying on his own ability, his own righteousness of following the temple laws and traditions, but Jesus tells him to go, sell all he has and give to the poor. We then see that he goes away sad, because he is rich and has many things and does not want to part with them. Now this is the point I want to make here, his disciples ask...who then can be saved? And Jesus responded, with man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible. I think that is the whole entire point of these verses here. It isn't the strength of your faith, it isn't some promise that all you need to do is pray more, believe more, and try harder and God will grant what you ask. We know that this isn't true, even in our own lives. We all have unanswered prayers, we have all had answers to prayers in ways that are not what we wanted. Even the Apostle Paul begged God 3 times to remove the thorn in his flesh, but God responded and said. " My grace is sufficient for you."

So think about that a minute, did God not heal Paul of his affliction because he just didn't believe or have enough faith? No, God did not remove it for it served his purpose, God allowed Paul to continue with that affliction for his glory. Even Paul recognized it, and said that he appears weak, he is not a good speaker and there is nothing in him that would be desirable to men, yet he was given authority and was a powerful man in the ministry of God's word to the gentiles. So let me ask you? Did Paul move mountains? Of course he did, but it may not have been the ones he wanted to move, but God used Paul in a powerful way for his own purpose and glory.

And I think that is the point here, it isn't that our faith and belief grant us our wants and desires, but it is that can and will move mountains to grant us what we need for his purpose and glory. To be where he wants us to be, to live how he wants us to live. Paul understood his affliction, the limitations that it brought upon him, but he rejoiced in it.

I was going to have us do this as one of our readings this morning, but decided instead to include it here, so instead of referencing to what we had read, we can see it fully applied by reading it here. 2 Corinthians 12. starting in verse 1. "It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast, I will come to visions and revelations for the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago-whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows- such a one was caught up in the third heaven. And I know such a man-whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such a one I will boast yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a full; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me. And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thron in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart fro me. And he said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in the infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Or James, Count it all joy when we suffer various trials, for the testing of your faith produces patience. When we are weak, then we must rely upon God and it is then that God is glorified. I think that there is a misconception that God's provision, and protection will always keep us from harm, and difficulties. But the reality is not that God keeps us from these things, but that he sees us through them. He is there with us as we suffer, as we endure these tests of faith. And that is not to say that God doesn't protect us, for surely without his hedge of protection everyone of us realizes how much worse life could be. But he does also allow us to suffer, to go through things, to learn the lesson over and over again that we can not do this by ourselves but that we must rely on him.

I am often reminded of Job. How God allowed Satan to test him, removed everything from him, his family, his health, his friends, and even his wife told him to give up, to curse God and die. But Job did not, he complained, he petitioned God, but he did not lose his faith. He knew that God is faithful, and he remained faithful. We have all suffered things, the loss of loved ones, hardships, strife, but I think it is pretty safe to say that none of us has ever had our faith tested like Job. And I think even just that alone is something to be thankful, and grateful for. Job stands as an example to us, not only as a champion of faith, but at least for me it helps to keep things in perspective. Unlike Paul's thorn in the flesh we may not know the purpose and reason for what ever trial it is that we are going through, and in fact I believe that it may not even be for ourselves, but God may allow us to suffer for the benefit of others.

By that I mean, that how we conduct ourselves, staying true to what we believe no matter how dark the night may be, no matter how harsh the persecution and suffering shines forth the legitimacy of such a faith. And the exercise of your faith, it is a witness to God. When most people would buckle and crumble under the weight, when we say, I stand, by the grace of God, it is a strong witness for the faith that we hold. I Think of Daniel in the Lion's Den, WE all know the story, but I want to read the King's reaction when he went the next day and found Daniel alive. Daniel 6, verse 25-27. "Then the King Darius wrote, To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth. Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For he is the living God, and steadfast forever. His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall endure to the end. HE delivers and rescues, and he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions."

Or earlier in the book of Daniel was Shadrack Meshack and Abendigo. Nebuchadnezer constructed an idol out of gold and commanded that upon the hearing of horn, flute, harp, lyre and psaltery that they shall all worship the golden image, and whoever does not worship the idol shall be thrown into the furnace. We all know how the story goes, they did not bow down and worship the idol for they would not deny God but stood in faith in opposition to the decree to worship this false God. So they were thrown into the furnace, and God spared them, protected them to the point that it is recorded not even their hair was singed, nor did they even smell like fire. But the point I want to make here is at the end, verse 28. "Nebuchadnezar spoke, saying, Blessed be the God of shadrach, meshach and abednego who sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him, and they have frustrated the kings word, and yielded their bodies that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God. Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego shall be cut into pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap because there is no other God who can deliver like this.

So keeping this in mind, I want to read our passage in Mark again today, verse 22. "So Jesus answered and said to them, Have faith in God. 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. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone forgive him, that your father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.

We just looked at a few examples today of God removing the mountains, doing the impossible for his faithful followers. And as I said earlier, this isn't some charismatic formula to guarantee the answer to prayer that you desire. Nor is this the idea of that your prayer has not been answered as you desire because you just did not have enough faith or that God isn't hearing you. The problem is not God, if our prayers are not being answered it is probably because we are not praying properly. Taking Paul as an example, he prayed 3 times that God would remove his affliction, but God did not. God did not answer Paul's prayer for deliverance, but instead provided him with the strength to endure it.

Maybe, just maybe that is the point. God has not answered our prayer for deliverance, because it is his will that we rely on him to endure it. When Nebuchadnezar confronted Shadrach, Meshack, and abedigo they answered and said if you throw us into the fire our God is able to deliver us. But if not, let it be known to you that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the image you have set up. They believed that God could indeed deliver them, but also understood that he may not, be resolved that either way does not effect their faith. If we are suffering, if we are struggling with something and we are praying and asking God for deliverance, I think it is right to also keep in mind that maybe deliverance is not the point, but instead strength to endure. And just like these 3 with the fiery furnace, or with Daniel, whether God delivers, or not, does not matter, we are to be faithful, and true in our trust in him.

Remembering that even though he may not remove the mountain that we see before us, he may not deliver us from our illness, or our trials, he has removed the mountain that stands between God and Man making it possible for us to approach him, to come to him in prayer, to seek guidance, deliverance, and strength. It is this mountain of Sin that separates us from God is the mountain that truly matters. And that mountain, can only be removed by faith, through the blood of Christ shed on the cross. When God gives the new birth, and we cry out to him in faith seeking forgiveness and reconciliation. Notice that the last 2 verses in Jesus instruction here have to do with forgiveness.

This is all tied together, and seems to be rather clear to me that he is not talking about the power of our faith and prayer removing physical mountains, but rather spiritual, the one that separates us from God. Come to God with faith, repenting and asking forgiveness, and do not doubt for whatever things you ask when you pray believe that you will receive them. God promises that if we repent and believe on him that we shall be saved from the wrath to come. Do not doubt this, this is a promise of God, the mighty God, the creator of all things, the author and finisher of our faith. Or, is there still this mountain of sin, and rebellion in your life, separating you from God. If so, cry out today that God will remove it and cast it into the sea, turn, repent, believe as we read in Hebrews this morning. Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, do not be like those who he swore shall not enter his rest. Repent, and cry out in faith for God to remove that mountain of separation.