

Have Faith In God
Mark 11:20-25
Key Verse: 11:22

by Sarah Barry

"Have faith in God," Jesus answered."

In the last passage we studied about Jesus who came as King. He came into Jerusalem as a humble and gentle king, riding the colt of a donkey. The crowd recognized him as the Messiah. They put branches on the road before him and they shouted, "Hosanna! Praise the King." He came in this way to announce his kingship. He fulfilled the words of the prophet Zachariah. He is a righteous king who brings salvation and peace. But he is the Lord. He taught his disciples to accept his Lordship over all things. Those who are not humble enough to welcome King Jesus into their hearts as Lord cannot know his peace or salvation. Those who deny the Lordship of Christ cannot find the meaning of life. They cannot but be involved in the politics of a world without God. Finally they become the enemies of God like the Pharisees and Sadducees. Jesus was going to Jerusalem to become a ransom sacrifice for the sins of the world. His disciples could not understand him. They were still thinking about human power and authority. But after his death and resurrection, they would understand. Jesus called his disciples and us to conquer the world with the gospel of God. To do this we must have faith in God. In today's passage, Jesus talks with his disciples about the fig tree that withered overnight (20-25). In this conversation Jesus teaches his disciples and us what kind of faith we must have. Let us pray that we may have the faith that Jesus wants us to have.

I. Faith that moves mountains (20-23)

First, Jesus' power and authority (20-21). Verse 20 begins with the words, "In the morning, as they went along..." It was the third day of the Passion Week. The day before, he had cursed a fruitless fig tree and cleansed the fruitless temple. Peter and the others must have been shocked at Jesus' power and authority when he went to the temple and cleansed it before the very eyes of the corrupt religious leaders. The chief priests and teachers of the Law were furious and they were afraid of him.

Now, the next morning, as Jesus and his disciples went along, on the way back to Jerusalem, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered what Jesus had said. This fig tree had been in beautiful foliage. How could it be that in the space of one night, the flourishing fig tree had dried up from the roots! Wow! It was a surprise. At the time, Peter probably didn't think much about Jesus' quiet words, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." Now he realized that Jesus' words had awesome power. At the word of Jesus, the fig tree dried up completely from the roots. In his amazement, Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!" The power and authority of Jesus' words really impressed Peter. With this kind of power and authority, the enemies of Israel could be destroyed and the nation restored. With this power and authority Jesus could establish his Messianic kingdom. But Peter did not have power. He did not have the power that comes from God.

Second, have faith in God (22,23). How did Jesus respond to Peter's amazed reaction? Jesus understood Peter's desire for power. Jesus said, "Have faith in God" (22). Jesus knew that the source of power and authority is God. To tap that power requires faith. Didn't they have faith in God? Yes, they believed in God. Then, what kind of faith in God did Jesus want them to have? Look at verse 23. "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him." Jesus wanted them to have faith that moves mountains. Faith that moves mountains is faith that defies our human limits. When we think about telling a mountain to "Go, throw yourself into the sea," our first thought is, "it's impossible." When I think about my own abilities and limits, it is impossible. But what about God? God is the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth. The Psalmist wrote, "O God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas, who formed the mountains by your power, having armed yourself with strength, who stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves..." (Ps 65:5-7) There is nothing that the Almighty, Creator God cannot do. A mountain is too big for me to move. But God can move any mountain. Jesus wants his disciples to have faith that moves mountains. When a young shepherd boy named David came into the camp of the army of Israel with some bread and cheese for his soldier brothers, he saw and heard the Philistine champion Goliath defy the army of Israel. The Israelites trembled with fear. No one moved. But the shepherd boy had faith in Almighty God. He shouted, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he can defy the armies of the living God?" The king sent him to

fight. But David did not depend on his own skill or ability or on himself. He tried on the king's armor and decided not to wear it. His human limits did not stop him. He depended on the power of Almighty God. And the giant Goliath was felled by one smooth stone from David's sling. David fought by faith in Almighty God. God gave him victory.

Once Dr. Ben Toh was denied a US residence permit. He had a wife and 4 children. But he received letters threatening deportation. For 8 years he struggled with this problem. Once we went out on the street and collected signatures from whoever would sign our petition to grant him a residence permit. But it did no good. Then, Dr. Lee asked him to deliver a message on this passage, "Have faith in God." When he accepted this word and delivered the message, God moved the mountain and he was granted a permanent residence visa. It was by the power of faith. It was God's grace.

Jesus wanted his disciples to have absolute faith. He wanted them to have the power that comes from faith. Why did Jesus want his disciples to have the power which comes from faith? It is because the disciples of Jesus had to conquer the whole world with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the power of faith. May God help us to have faith that produces power. When Jesus said, "Have faith in God," it meant, "You are weak, but our God is Almighty God." When Jesus said, "Have faith in God," it meant, "Our God is Almighty God. We can do nothing but he can do everything for us when we believe in him." When Jesus said, "Have faith in God," it meant, "Believe in God Almighty absolutely and see the great things God will do for you." William Carey was an early pioneer missionary to India. He said, "Attempt great things for God; expect great things from God." We must believe that God made the heavens and the earth out of nothing. Our God is the Almighty Creator God who made everything out of nothing (Ge 1 and 2). Abraham believed in God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. Because of his faith in Almighty God he became the father of one son and the father of many nations. (Ro 4:17-18) As we know, in history all men have knelt down before the power of death: Julius Caesar, Genghis Khan, All people knelt down before the power of death--some quietly, some very sorrowfully. But God raised Jesus from the dead and made him the firstfruits of eternal life (1Co 15:20). When we believe in Almighty God who sent Jesus, and raised him from the dead, we have eternal life. We cross over from death to life. (Jn 5:24)

When Jesus said to his disciples, "Have faith in God," he meant that by faith they should depend on God, and conquer the world with the gospel of Jesus. Once, a father whose son was demon-possessed and showed the symptoms of epilepsy came to Jesus and said, "If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes" (9:22,23). Jesus rebuked the father's half-faith, then, Jesus healed the boy. Thus he demonstrated the power of faith. In 1982, 23 Korean missionaries went to Winnipeg, Canada as sewing machine operators. They didn't know English well enough to make a phone call for a taxi. Dr. Lee visited them and shared Mark 9:23: "Everything is possible for him who believes." By faith in Almighty God they overcame their limits and pioneered God's work among Canadian students.

Paul was old and tired, and he was in prison. He had no one to depend on. But he depended on God Almighty. He believed absolutely that he could go to Rome and establish a world mission center there, so that the gospel of Jesus might spread to all nations through Roman roads. Finally, Paul went to Rome in chains. But he wrote from the Roman jail, "I can do everything through (Christ) who gives me strength." (Php 4:13) From his testimony, we learn that Paul himself had no power to change such a great Roman Empire; he had no power to change the course of world history. But Paul had absolute faith in God; Paul could do nothing, but God could do everything for him. To have faith in God is very simple but it requires absoluteness. Without absolute faith no one can experience the power of faith. By faith Paul was able to have a vision to conquer the whole world with the gospel of Jesus. Yes, his faith fulfilled his vision. His faith also helped many people to have vision. May God bless each of us with the power and authority of faith when we believe in him absolutely.

In Christian history there are many kinds of mountain-moving faith. By faith, Martin Luther challenged his own hypocrisy. He also wrote the 95 Theses of the Reformation in 1517. By faith he challenged the corruption of the leaders in the huge Roman Catholic Church. His mountain-moving faith was virtually to fight against the corruption of the Holy Roman Empire. By faith, David Livingstone (1813-1873) went on a heroic evangelistic journey that lasted 30 years to southern, central, and eastern Africa--places where no white man had previously ventured. His mountain-moving faith was to love the lost souls of African people. We must know what faith is. Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Again Hebrews 11:3 says, "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of

what was visible." We cannot experience the power of faith if we insist on understanding it first. We must obey Jesus' words and do what we should do. Then God always is with us and he helps us so that what we ask for is done. For example, Hebrews 11:29 says, "By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned." It is indeed amazing that unarmed soldiers of Israel knocked down the walls of invincible Jericho, by simply obeying the words of God. It is also amazing that South Korean students have sent 1,500 self-supporting missionaries to 89 countries when they simply believed and prayed. When we have faith in God absolutely, God gives us his divine power in our hearts. We can see the most beautiful example of mountain-moving faith in Jesus himself. Jesus chose the twelve disciples from among very ordinary people and planted faith and hope in their hearts. It seemed to be a small matter. But there was Jesus' mountain-moving faith. Jesus' disciples looked weak and seemed to not understand what he was teaching them. But, because of Jesus' faith in God, they were raised as matchless history-makers. Because of Jesus' faith in God, the disciples were changed from clumps of desire into servants of God like Jesus.

Third, faith that overcomes doubt (23b,24). Let's read verse 23 again. "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him." In order to have faith that moves mountains, we must overcome our doubts moment by moment by depending on God's words. When we live by faith, all kinds of doubts come into our hearts. It is because when the seed of faith is struggling to grow in a person's heart, doubt follows like a shadow follows a tree. To build a building is very hard, but to set it on fire and burn it down is easy. Planting doubt in someone's heart is easy, like setting fire to a building. But to plant faith in Jesus in someone takes life-giving effort and sacrifice. Still, we have no guarantee. Therefore, we must know that success comes after overcoming Satan's doubt. One young man wanted to live a holy life. But he soon became shaky when Satan came and whispered, "Hey, you! Take it easy! You can do it tomorrow." The root of doubt is laziness or an easy-going mentality. So, what is mountain-moving faith? It is faith that sees what needs to be done and steps out to do it. It is faith that trusts God and doesn't give up. It is faith that doesn't think about human limits, but thinks about Almighty God. In order to have mountain-moving faith we must fight against the doubt in our hearts. We can overcome doubt when we know the heart of our God and stand on his side. We can overcome doubt with a decision of faith. We must put out the fire of doubt in our hearts every day. Then God will give us the power of faith.

II. Faith that prays (24)

Read verse 24. "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." If we have faith in God, we must pray. Prayer is the expression of faith. Prayer is talking to God and listening to God. We must thank God and praise him. We must rejoice in God, for he is good. We must know his heart and pray for his prayer topics "Father, Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

In 1985, Dr. Samuel and Grace Lee visited Russia. Lenin, Stalin and Marx held Russia in the iron grip of communism. Dr. Lee visited Korea and gave them a prayer topic to pioneer Russia with the gospel. Korean students caught the vision and began to pray. Miraculously, Gorbachev came to power with Perestroika and glasnost. Communism collapsed, the door opened, and by 1990 UBF missionaries had entered Moscow State University. God answered prayer and moved a mountain into the sea.

We are living in the first part of the 21st century. Everybody is proud of the civilization of the 21st century. Everybody pretends to be happy. People pretend that they are living in paradise because of our cultural achievements and advanced civilization. But inwardly people live in fear and doubt, under Satan's rule. It is remarkable to know that each time a civilization rises to its peak, the world becomes utterly corrupted and people become ungodly. As a result, people do not know how to pray. Prayer is, in essence, spiritual breathing. In prayer we lay all our anxieties and burdens of sin on Jesus. In prayer we can rejoice in God, believing that he will care for us. But those who do not pray are all like asthma patients. Modern times are full of asthma patients or depression patients. Look at verse 24 again. "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." This verse teaches us that when we pray, God hears our prayers, and our requests are granted. This is a great promise of God. We cannot do great things for God. But we must believe that when we pray God answers our prayers, and that we have received what we prayed for.

For the last several years we prayed, "May God make North America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (1 Pe 2:9). We have prayed that God would raise 10,000 Bible teachers and spread them all over the college campuses of

America. We pray for the Muslim world and North Korea. We pray that God may call and send out 100,000 missionaries to the ends of the earth. At first, our prayer topics were hard to accept. But when we prayed and prayed, gradually God moved our hearts. Now we pray from our hearts, "May God make North America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." At the recent KIMNET conference, Dr. Joseph Chung decided to go out as a silver missionary to a country that needs doctors. M. Jacob Lee went to Belize to spy out the land. Some students have also decided to go out as missionaries and have even chosen their mission fields. God is hearing and answering prayer to send out 100,000 missionaries to the countries of the world.

III. Faith that forgives (25)

Look at verse 25. "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." Until now, Jesus talked about faith that moves mountains and the power of prayer. Now, Jesus talks about faith that forgives. It might have been a very difficult problem for his disciples to forgive each other. So, once Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Mt 18:21,22). Wow! Seventy-seven times! Not to forgive is easy. But to forgive others who sin against us is not easy. When we read biographies of heroes, we learn that each was the product of the social and national milieu of his times. Most of them had courage to overcome impossible tasks. Many of them burned with the spirit of conquest and victory. But there was a common weakness in most of them: They could not forgive others' wrongdoings. Most of them died holding grudges in their hearts. They were nothing but fallen men. Let's read verse 25. "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." Jesus wants us to have faith that forgives. When we don't forgive others' sins, our Father in heaven does not forgive us our sins. Forgiving others might be a most difficult matter to fallen men. Rather, it is easy for us to keep the law of Moses, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

How can we forgive others? We must look at Jesus' cross. We are objects of God's wrath and anger, living according to our sinful natures. But God nailed his one and only Son to the cross in order to forgive our sins. Through his Son's ransom sacrifice, God gave us the grace of forgiveness. Our sins are forgiven, and we have become the precious children of God. Therefore, we can forgive others' sins when we remember God's grace. A certain minister's two sons were shot to death by a militant communist. Later, the one who shot them was arrested. But the minister adopted him as his own son. Some asked him, "Why did you do that?" He said, "Because Jesus forgave my sins."

We can forgive others only when we realize Jesus' grace of forgiveness of sins. Faith in God involves forgiveness of others. The chosen people Israel became bitter enemies of God. The chosen people Israel despised and rejected Jesus when he healed the sick and proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God. The Jews were God's chosen people. He chose them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But they crucified Jesus. They nailed Jesus to a cross, saying, "Save yourself as you saved others." But Jesus did not save himself. It was because he wanted to forgive all humankind. His blood dropped on the heads and shoulders of Mary, his mother and the other Marys. At the time of pain and sorrow, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34a). Jesus prayer was for me. He prayed for my forgiveness and he shed his blood to purchase my pardon. I received his grace of forgiveness and his love. How can I hold a grudge against anyone? How can I hold on to bitterness or allow an unforgiving spirit to conquer my heart? Jesus' forgiving others from the cross was very painful and difficult. A Roman soldier who was one of the executioners cried out, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" (15:39) We need faith in God to forgive others. To have faith in God involves forgiveness of sin.

In this passage we learn that we must have faith in God so that we can overcome our human limits, live the life God wants us to live, and do the work God wants us to do. Let's read verse 22, again. "Have faith in God," Jesus answered."