

HAVE FAITH IN GOD

Mark 11:20-25

Key Verse: 11:22

“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered.”

In chapter 11, there are two significant public events: Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem and clearing the temple. Jesus entering Jerusalem as the King, riding a donkey’s colt revealed that he is the humble Savior King, the King of peace and love. Through clearing the temple, Jesus revealed that he is the God of righteousness, justice, and judgment. Today’s passage takes place after these two events, and it is followed by the strong opposition of the religious leaders. Jesus’ teaching here is not addressed to the general public, but to his disciples, who would succeed his ministry. We need to understand Jesus’ teaching in context. It is illustrated by what happened to a fig tree (12-14). On the way to Jerusalem from Bethany, the day after his triumphal entry, Jesus was hungry. He expected to find some fruit on a fig tree. But there was none. Then Jesus said, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard him say that. Was Jesus angry at the fig tree because he was hungry? No. Jesus was using the fruitless fig tree as a visual aid to educate his disciples. Jesus had in mind the Jerusalem temple, which was full of activity, but unproductive--like the fruitless fig tree. Later that day, Jesus cleared the temple of moneychangers and those selling animals, and then went out of the city again.

The next morning, as they went along, Jesus and his disciples saw the fig tree withered from the roots (20). Peter was surprised and exclaimed, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!” (21) In response to this, Jesus said, “Have faith in God” (22). Usually, when we face challenging issues, we remember Jesus’ words, “Have faith in God” and this helps us to overcome them. But there is deeper meaning. Jesus’ words are not just a general exhortation; they are related to God’s justice. Let’s think about the deep meaning of Jesus’ words, “Have faith in God.” Let’s consider how these words are relevant to us today.

At first glance, Jesus' answer seems disconnected to Peter's statement. But we must remember that Jesus has eyes like blazing fire which pierce through any human heart to discern the truth. Jesus saw the issue in Peter's heart. What was it? When Jesus cleared the temple, Peter and the disciples were shocked and began to be fearful. What were they afraid of? They were afraid of the religious establishment and its power. The nation of Israel was governed by the Sanhedrin, which was composed of 71 religious leaders, including the high priest, Pharisees, and teachers of the law. They had great authority over all religious and political affairs in Israel. They should have been shepherds of Israel, knowing God's heart. However, they had misused this power for their own selfish gain. For example, they made a lot of money from the temple, collaborating with merchants and Roman authorities. In this way they became very rich and powerful. Anyone who opposed their corrupt leadership faced harsh retaliation, including public slander. For example, when Jesus became popular, the religious leaders felt their power was threatened and spread rumors that Jesus was demon possessed to discredit him (3:22). Though they looked pious, they were hypocritical liars, greedy, violent, lustful, and lawless. In brief, they were a powerful evil. Peter thought that it was too dangerous to challenge their authority. Yet Jesus had confronted them very courageously by clearing the temple. The disciples expected a vicious counterattack. That is why they were fearful.

When Jesus said, "Have faith in God," he wanted Peter and the disciples to overcome their fear. To leaders, the fear problem is serious. If leaders are fearful, they cannot think properly; they make foolish decisions and mislead God's people. The source of this fear is Satan, whose goal is to drive leaders to self-destruct, damaging others. Once a leader becomes fearful within, he has lost the battle before fighting. The real enemy is inner fear, not the outward circumstances. That is why, from time to time, Jesus challenged his disciples to have faith in God that overcomes fear. For example, 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, who is the God in whom Jesus tells us to have faith? This God is the Almighty Creator God. When God said, "Let there be light," there was light (Gen 1:3). Blazing light lit up the universe. This God is the source of life (Gen

2:7). Everything comes from him and exists through him and for him (Ro 11:36). This God 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. Sometimes people become so depressed, anxious, and desperate that they lose the meaning of life; they call it an "existential crisis." However, God never has an "existential crisis." No one can threaten his existence. He can do whatever he wills without help from anyone. Usually, when people have great power, they become merciless toward the weak. But this Almighty God is compassionate. He is the Redeemer of mankind. He proclaimed to Moses: "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). Wow! What a wonderful God! 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 is always love. His goodness and love are unfailing. This God sent Jesus into the world as the Savior of mankind.

This God is not only full of love, compassion, and mercy, he is also holy, righteous and just. In Apostle John's vision, around God's throne in heaven, four living creatures cover their eyes. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come" (Rev 4:8). Furthermore, when God proclaimed himself to Moses, he also included these words: "Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation" (Ex 34:7b). The prophet Habakkuk proclaimed about God, "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong" (Hab 1:13a). This God never condones sin. When his chosen people Israel became evil, he did not overlook their sin. He was ready to judge them. Jesus' cursing the fig tree was a prelude to God's judgment against Israel. It was the first time Jesus used his great power to curse and Peter was surprised. Jesus showed another side to his disciples: He is the Mighty God who will judge all evil and unrighteousness.

When we think about who God is, we can understand the meaning of Jesus' words, "Have faith in God." Jesus wanted his disciples to trust God the Creator and Redeemer who is almighty, eternal, compassionate, loving, holy, righteous, and just--who judges evil and wickedness. Therefore, whenever we

confront the dark reality of evil, we need not be afraid. We should have faith in God and stand firm until God wins the victory over the power of evil.

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 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 Jewish religious system. This system pointed to the Messiah. But when the Messiah came, the system stood against him. The religious leaders had hijacked the system for their own glory. They were too proud and self-centered to yield to God’s kingdom advancing through the Messiah. When Jesus challenged them to repent, they falsely accused him and condemned him to death. Finally, they had him killed on a cross. But God raised Jesus from the dead and made him Savior and Lord. In this way, Jesus moved the mountain into the sea. Jesus made the old system obsolete and opened a new and living way to God (Heb 8:13; 10:20). Jesus became the temple, the perfect sacrifice, and the everlasting Great High Priest (Jn 2:21; Heb 8:1,2; 10:14). Jesus threw the mountain of man’s sin into the sea by the power of his blood. Jesus threw the mountain of death into the sea through his resurrection. Jesus crushed the head of Satan, winning everlasting victory.

After doing this great work, Jesus gave his disciples the task of proclaiming the gospel to the world. This started from Jerusalem (Ac 1:8). There, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost and transformed them. Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, 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. Through Peter’s message, God moved the mountains of sin and unbelief in the hearts of thousands of people; they repented and believed in Jesus (Ac 2:41). Peter was no longer a man of fear, but of courageous faith. Jesus wants all of us to have courageous faith in God, like Peter, and 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.

Here, I remember the late Dr. Samuel Lee, whom I respect deeply for his faith in God. In order to obey the world mission command of Jesus, he came as a missionary to America in 1977 and began to evangelize college students. This surprised many, for it seemed to reverse the historical trend of America sending missionaries to other nations. Remarkably, mission leaders like Lesslie Newbiggin were calling for just such a reversal.¹ They realized that nations who had received missionaries had a vibrant gospel spirit which the sending nations needed to restore. But to most people, Dr. Lee's act seemed presumptuous. They wondered how people from a poor, developing country could dare to evangelize Americans. Dr. Lee faced mountains of resistance rooted in national and religious pride.

However, the work of the Holy Spirit through his ministry was undeniable. Many young Americans accepted the gospel. They stopped being rebellious and began to obey the word of God. This especially surprised their parents. They began to change drastically. Party animal candidates began to worship God and teach the Bible. Souls wounded by their parents' divorces were healed and established godly families. But where God was working mightily, the devil also worked. An organization called CAN began to attack Dr. Lee's ministry. They went as far as to kidnap young Bible students and hold them captive until they renounced their faith. This happened more than 20 times. It was a dangerous season in our church history. But Dr. Lee was not daunted. He did not shrink back or give up. He was fearless. Where did this fearless spirit come from? During this period, he wrote Mark 11:22, "Have faith in God," on his daily planner 100 times a day, or more. He depended on God alone and spoke God's words with power. Then God moved the mountains before him. In the course of time, CAN lost several major court cases and was forced to disband and has now disappeared. But the word of God continues to work mightily through UBF. Christian leaders raised through Dr. Lee's faith spread throughout the USA and the world and are proclaiming the gospel of Christ boldly.

What mountains are we facing? Through the study of Revelation last year we could identify Babylon the Great--an alliance of evil power under the control of Satan which included the political, military, and economic might of

¹ Lesslie Newbiggin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986).

the nations. Manifestations of this evil power can already be seen in our times as human trafficking rings, drug dealing organizations, the pornography industry, and black-market weapons trade to name a few. This evil is working in Chicago, where women are forced into bondage almost daily, mostly on the west and south sides.² Some of these women are college students. Furthermore, Chicago is considered one of the most gang-infested cities in the United States, with an estimated population of over 100,000 active gang members. Sixty percent of homicides in Chicago are gang related.³ Then there is the power of sin in our own hearts, through which the devil works to enslave us to evil. Many young people are bound by a darkness they do not understand and cannot control. Who can set us and them free? Jesus says to us, “Have faith in God.” Almighty God liberates us from sin through Jesus Christ and enables us to stand against evil and serve him without fear. Let’s have faith in our mighty God and proclaim the gospel boldly in our times!

To speak God’s words in power, we must overcome doubt. 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 really work through my gospel presentation? Will my Bible study be effective? Is it really possible to raise 120 disciples of Jesus among college students within my lifetime? Can God revive America once again to be a Bible-believing and missionary-sending 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 it come from? It is not psychological; it is the devil’s work.

In Genesis 3, we see how the devil destroyed man’s happiness. What method did he use? 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 fell under Satan’s control. Here we should acknowledge that doubt is Satan’s powerful weapon. When we begin to doubt God’s truth and his love, we become powerless. In order to speak God’s word with power, we need to fight a spiritual battle against doubt.

² <https://news.wttw.com/2020/10/03/preying-vulnerable-half-trafficked-women-and-girls-are-immigrants>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crime_in_Chicago

Faith in God is also expressed in prayer. 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 pray to him with faith. He is willing to answer our prayers. Recently, M. Esther Chung had a very difficult night due to a high heart rate. Her life was in danger. But without explanation, the next morning, her heart rate went back to normal. Then she stated, “God answered his people’s prayer.” Let’s pray continually, believing that God answers our prayer. Let’s also remember that effective prayer must be according to God’s will, not our selfish motives (1 Jn 5:14-15; Ja 4:3).

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.” This is the first mention of God as “your Father” in Mark’s gospel. Through Jesus’ mighty grace our relationship with God has been restored and we can come to him as his dear children. We can pray with great confidence that he loves us and hears us. But there is one thing we must do in prayer: forgive. If we have an unforgiving heart, our prayers will be hindered. To pray effectively, we must forgive anyone whom we hold anything against. When we remember Jesus’ grace of forgiveness for us, we too can forgive (Lk 23:34a). As we practice forgiveness during prayer, we can resolve the issues that divide and weaken our Christian fellowship. We can form a loving fellowship that is a power station for the great work of God.

Today we have heard Jesus’ words, “Have faith in God.” In whom or what is your deepest faith and trust? Your own willpower and intelligence? An advanced education or a record of past experiences? Your wealth? Or is it in another person besides God? These cannot give us victory over the power of evil and darkness. Let’s put our faith in God so that we may experience his mighty power to give us victory. Let’s proclaim the gospel to those bound by sin and evil and pray for God to set them free. Jesus said, “Have faith in God.”