



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Mark

December 10, 2017

Have Faith in God

Pastor Jeff Potts

What a joy to be able to worship with you guys here this morning! Thank you, Koby and Dave, for leading us in worship. It was just a rich time of getting to sing about how awesome God is. Welcome to Canyon Hills! If it's your first time, a special welcome to you. I'm one of the pastors here. My name is Jeff. I am glad you are here with us, that you've gotten to worship with us.

One of the things I do is oversee our Life Groups ministry. I dunk people from time to time with baptism, and then you'll see me up here every so often. Welcome! Glad you're here for the first time or the first time in a long time.

I know probably many of you are curious, as we're getting ready for Christmastime, what my Christmas list is. I know that's probably on the front of your mind. Pastor Steve, a few weeks ago, gave out his coffee order, trying to say that would be something Jesus would order. It's not, but he tried to share his coffee order with you, so I'm just going to be blatant and say I have a Christmas list and I want you guys to fill it.

What I want for Christmas this year is Life Group leaders. See what I did there? Okay, thank you. I got a couple of claps. You're picking up what I'm putting down. I like it. We need Life Group leaders. We are starting new Life Groups all the time. We always have new couples, new people who are coming to this church who are looking for community, and to do that well, we need more leaders.

So, if you call Canyon Hills your church home, if you love Jesus with all your heart, and you love people, you have met the minimum baseline requirement for Life Group leadership and we would love to talk with you about that, so come and find someone in the Life Group area in the lobby and we would love to talk with you about Life Group leadership. Thank you in advance for the Christmas gifts.

Why don't you turn in your Bibles with me to Mark, chapter 11? If you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles underneath the seats in front of you. I want you to be able to look at God's Word this morning. We've been going through the book of Mark, verse by verse, chapter by chapter,

sentence by sentence, word by word, really looking to see, "God, what do you have for us in this? Show us your character. Show us the ministry of your Son. Show us how we can live in response to that," and so we're just continuing on with that.

While you're turning there, we have a story. It's Christmas season, and so everyone's thinking about presents. There once was a young boy who was very excited for Christmastime. He wakes up one morning in the Christmas holiday season and he sees a gift. It's wrapped nicely and well, and he sees it has his name on it, and so after running down the stairs to see this gift, he sees his dad in the easy chair in the corner.

He starts going for it. He's very excited and he starts getting into the gift. He goes and he opens it up and he's so excited. He's looking at his dad like, "Dad, you're the best. It's amazing that you would get me a gift!" He starts going and throwing out the paper. You know how 6-year-olds do it, right?

All of a sudden, he goes, "Dad, what's the deal? There's nothing in this thing!" He goes, "Oh, son, I just thought you liked how it was wrapped! I thought you would just enjoy a nice wrapping present!" He goes, "Dad! There's no gift!" He goes, "Well, son, I thought you enjoyed opening the gift! I thought that was the most fun for you!" He goes, "Dad, you're killing me!" Not that a 6-year-old really says that, but you get what I'm saying.

I just showed you a picture of what we're going to look at in the life and ministry of Jesus, so I want you to keep this in mind, but if you're at Mark 11, would you stand with me for the reading of God's Word? Keep this little illustration in view and let's look at God's Word together. We're going to start in verse 12, and then we'll jump around from there.

"On the following day, when they came from Bethany, [Jesus] was hungry. And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. And he said to it, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.' And his disciples heard it." Jump down to verse 20.

"As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, 'Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.' And Jesus answered them, 'Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, "Be taken up and thrown into the sea," and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.'"

God, would you be with us this morning as we look at your Word? God, we thank you so much for the work of your Son, who we have thought about, worshiped, and considered this morning. God, it's in his name that we pray that you would be glorified and that you would give us open hearts to hear and receive the Word you want for us today. We love you. Amen.

A little background... This is Monday of Passion Week, so it's the day after Palm Sunday. Steve covered that last week. Jesus is heading back into Jerusalem as he went with his disciples. He stayed the night in the town of Bethany after Palm Sunday and he's walking back in the direction of Jerusalem on Monday morning. He sees this fig tree and it's in leaf, and so he goes to see if there's any fruit, and there is no fruit. So, he curses the tree.

Reading this, I was just kind of thinking to myself, "Jesus, this seems like a bit of an extreme measure. This is kind of a normal deal. Don't you understand that the fig tree was out of season? Why wouldn't you understand that? Why wouldn't you know that?" I kept on reading it a little bit more and still didn't have clarity on this, and so I'm like, "Jesus... Talk about a case of the Mondays! This is weird! I don't understand why you're acting like this."

So, I started thinking, "Jesus, why would you act like this? Why would you do that?" I did some digging, and in verse 12, it says, "...**he was hungry.**" So, I was like, "Does Jesus get *hangry*?" Husbands, boyfriends... You know what I'm talking about. Don't act like you don't have M&Ms and granola bars in your glove box.

Why the reaction? What's going on? Well, when I can't find the answer in the text, sometimes I have to look a little before, or sometimes I have to look a little after, and I think we have a better picture of this if we look before, so why don't we look at verse 11?

"And [Jesus] entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve." This is after Palm Sunday. People are dropping the branches down. He's riding on the donkey. People are saying, "**Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!**" All this pomp and circumstance and all of this stuff is happening, and then Jesus goes and looks in the temple, and then he leaves.

Then, he comes back, and as he comes back, we hit this story of him cursing some tree. Maybe the fig tree is a picture of something else entirely. It's an object lesson. Jesus is pointing to something bigger than a tree without fruit. He's pointing to a nation, a people, a religion without faith.

In the Old Testament, the fig tree is a picture of Israel and their relationship with God. So, if the fig tree is ripe and in season, it means the country of Israel is at peace with God. If it is dying and barren, then it's in conflict with God. We have an example of that in Jeremiah 8. God says,

"They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among the fallen; when I punish them, they shall be overthrown, says the Lord. When I would gather them, declares the Lord, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered, and what I gave them has passed away from them."

See, this tree is a picture of the nation Jesus came to save, the nation that God planted and said, "You are my people. This is my nation, chosen above every other nation," and they say, "No, thanks. We'll check out other things." The thing is that they looked so good on the outside. They had the rules and regulations. They had the cool clothing for the priests. The wrapping was shiny, but inside, there was no fruit and no faith. So, Jesus says to the tree, "You're done." The disciples hear it and consider it.

Then, down to verse 20, it's now Tuesday morning, so 24 hour later. Jesus and his disciples head back into Jerusalem. They went into Jerusalem, came back to Bethany, and are heading back into Jerusalem. The disciples notice that the fig tree had withered away to its roots. Peter specifically attributes that to Jesus cursing the tree. He says, "Jesus, wow! The tree you cursed has now withered away!"

How does Jesus respond to him? He says, "**Have faith in God.**" Faith is what Jesus called his disciples to and it's what every one of us has to consider this morning. Faith in God is the critical topic for the non-Christian to consider and is foundational for the Christian to know in a deep and meaningful way. So, if you are here this morning and you don't have a relationship with Jesus, I'm excited that you're here, because this is a message for you to receive saving faith. If you are here and you are a Christian, this is a message for us to deepen our faith.

How would we define *faith*? How can we think about that this morning? Faith trusts in a God that is real, that God saves, and that God is faithful. Faith is active. It lives out a belief that he exists, he's our Savior, and he's trustworthy. So, from this story, we get to see how Jesus deals with barren faith, how he calls nonbelievers to saving faith, and how he calls Christians to deeper faith.

1. *Jesus punishes barren faith.* He searched for fruit and he saw no fruit. He cursed the tree for a lack of fruit, and then he showed his power to follow through on his words. Like the fig tree, Jesus can recognize when a person has no faith, and he shows and will punish that. Back to the definition. Faith trusts that God is real, that God saves, and that God is faithful. Anything else is barren, fruitless faith.

Another way to put it would be false faith, because we all place our faith and trust in something. It's just that false faith puts trust in anything other than God and produces no fruit. You might think of the religion where millions of gods are worshiped for different aspects of life, or you might think about the person who says they don't believe or act like they believe in God and they feel far from God, but you know, it's also the good man who puts his faith in his retirement account.

It's the woman who places her value on what her body looks like. It's the parent that places their faith in the sports success of their children. It's the person who grew up in a Christian home and looks the part but couldn't explain the gospel if asked. It's the long-standing church member who attends every Sunday morning but doesn't read Scripture, doesn't pray, doesn't give, and doesn't love other people.

You cannot put faith in yourself, your job, your wife, your boyfriend, your money, your house, your brain, your experience, your friends, experts, your religious system, or your religious authority. You can only put faith in God alone. That's saving faith. Like the tree where Jesus will look behind the leaves for the fruit, Jesus searches behind the surface for our faith.

If you got to know me for long enough, you would get to know my behaviors. You would get to learn the things I do and see the things I do and say, and the ways I act and respond to different stresses in life. If you knew me for long enough and asked me some questions, you'd probably get to know about the things that have really impacted my life in big ways, some things that have influenced me.

If you thought about it for long enough, you might see how those two things correlate together. Yet God searches deeper than that. God searches the heart. Jeremiah 17:10 says, "**I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.**" You see, God looks at our motivations. He looks at our desires. He searches our hearts and he wants our hearts, and so he looks and says, "Is there faith in there?" and he will give us according to whether we have faith or not.

Jesus will punish barren faith. What's the punishment for that? What's the punishment for not having a saving relationship with Jesus? Well, the picture we have with the tree is complete death, withered to the roots, just...*poof*...gone. For people without faith, it's even worse. It's not just death; it's complete, eternal punishment in hell where you are face-to-face with a holy God and he is punishing you for the sins you have committed against him.

You get a million years in and you think to yourself, "You know what? I have another million after this, and then after that, I have infinity." There's never going to be a time where it lets up. There's never going to be a time where it stops, where God says, "Okay, you know what? Everything's fine now." There's never going to be a time where he turns his back and walks away. It's just continual, constant, never-ending, and never-ceasing.

Do you have faith in God? Is your heart full of faith, or are you more of a picture of an empty Christmas box? It's the critical question to consider, because Jesus lays out very clearly that he is faithful to punish people without faith. He does not care how shiny the wrapping paper is. That's the consequence of no faith, but then Jesus gives us an opportunity, because...

2. Jesus calls people to have faith in God. Just as Jesus called his disciples to have faith in him, we all have that call today. Many of you have already answered the call. You have a relationship with Jesus. You love him. You've surrendered your heart to him. Yet there are some of you here who don't have a relationship with Jesus. Again, I am so glad you're here because you have that call and invitation this morning. That is amazing!

Just level with me for a second. Let's have an honest moment. We just talked about how God searches hearts. God knows everything you've ever done. He knows everything you've ever thought. He knows everything you've ever said, even under your breath. He knows every

motivation behind every action, over every second of your life, and he still offers relationship with you. That's an amazing opportunity. That's incredible grace. Have faith in God.

Faith is about trust. It has to change us from the inside out. What do I mean by *trust*? Well, to have faith in something, you have to know it, believe it, and trust it. For instance, I can know that these stairs will get me down to the floor. If I walk on these stairs they'll get me down to the floor. I know (or at least hope) they are to code and they can hold my weight. I believe if I walk down those stairs I will, in fact, achieve what I'm trying to accomplish.

If I stop right there, saying, "I know those stairs are good. I believe those stairs are good," I haven't gone far enough. You know, in James 2, it says the demons believe in God and shudder. They don't have a personal relationship with him. They don't trust him. They know who he is. They believe who he is, and they're against him. So, it's not enough to just say, "You know, I know that's good. I believe that's good." I have to know the stairs will work, I have to believe the stairs will work, and then I have to trust that the stairs will work.

In Ephesians 2:8, it says, "**For by grace you have been saved through faith...**" Now, this faith is not a work. It's a gift of God, not by works, so no one can boast, but faith is the living and active response to who we know Jesus is and who we believe him to be. Do you have faith in God? Do you know who Jesus is? Do you believe that, and are you living actively in response to that?

Pastor Koby already shared it. Dale shared it during Communion, and I'm going to share it one more time. This is the gospel. Jesus Christ is God and he came to earth, was born of a virgin, and then lived a perfect life here on earth. He never sinned one time, not once. He lived that perfect life to fulfill righteousness, the law, something you and I could never do, and he did it in perfection.

Do you know what he did after that? He died. He died on a cross for you and me. He died for sin. He paid for all the sin you and I have committed and that he never committed so we could have forgiveness, so we could be new, and so we don't have to define ourselves by that stuff anymore. Then, on the third day, he rose from the grave. He beat death and proved that he is God and he also gives us hope not only to be different today, but to have a relationship with him forever.

That's the gospel. That is amazing news that is such an amazing love story for us to consider, a story filled with hope to think about this morning. If you're here and you don't have a relationship with him, again, you have the invitation to have a relationship with him today. Here's what you do.

First, you just admit you're not God. Just be honest and say, "Listen. It hasn't worked out with me being in control. God, I admit I'm a sinner. I admit that you're God and I actually need you to be saved. God, I don't know your Son that well, but I believe the things they're saying about him and I want to get to know you more. I believe in this. God, I confess that I need you. I confess that you are God. Would you help me change in life?"

Again, if you're here this morning and you have not surrendered your heart to Jesus yet, you've heard about the consequence, and then here's the opportunity. There are going to be people up front after the service, right in front of the stage, who are going to be praying with people, and they would love to do that with you. They would love to celebrate with you if you're putting your faith in Christ this morning. If you have questions, they would love to talk with you about that. That would just be a privilege for us to get to do that with you.

The passage takes a bit of a turn. Early on in the passage, Jesus is dealing directly with a lack of faith, and then things seem to change gears as he talks with his disciples. These are the men who follow Jesus, who have faith in him. So, for the rest of the passage, Jesus addresses practical faith.

This is for the Christian. These are for people who have put their faith in Christ already, like many of you. People have written books and volumes on both of these areas of faith, and there's good reason why, because these are two critical areas that deepen our faith and dependency on God. When employed and seen they are an incredible witness to other people. Let's just look at verse 23 and kind of go on down. He starts by saying, "**Have faith in God,**" in verse 22. Verse 23:

"Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

3. *People with faith pray with power.* Prayer is linked with faith because it's about a vertical relationship where we celebrate God's grace and we ask him for help, so when we pray we say, every day, "God, you are God and I'm not." When we pray, we thank him for the incredible blessings in our lives and we ask him to continue to just amaze us with his grace and with his glory.

In this story, Jesus proved the effectiveness of prayer. The tree is just gone, withered, dead. The disciples were amazed. They were like, "Jesus, you just keep on doing this! It's like one hit after another! It's amazing! It's unbelievable, what you do!" Jesus just kind of looks at them and says, "You think that tree was a big deal? If you have faith, go and throw Mount Rainier into the Puget Sound. No big, if you pray with faith, if you don't doubt." He's calling his disciples to pray with belief, with faith.

J.C. Ryle, an author, wrote a little pamphlet called *A Call to Prayer*. He says, "Faith is to prayer what the feather is to the arrow: without it prayer will not hit the mark. We should cultivate the habit of pleading promises in our prayers." It might go like, "God, I know you are faithful. Thank you for never changing your character. Now, Lord, will you continue to be faithful with my family? God, would you continue to give us opportunities to share the gospel with our neighbors and with people we love around us?"

God, I know you've called us to go and make disciples. It says that in Matthew 28. God, would you give us success as we move forward with a second campus? Would you send people who don't have faith in you toward us so we could share the gospel with them? God, would you give us a place where we could worship so we could effectively make more and better disciples for you?" Jesus is calling his disciples to pray with faith.

Now, this is a difficult passage because this is a section of Scripture that I think gets misused a lot. I'll just read verse 24. **"Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."** This brings a lot of extreme emotions and thoughts. There are two extremes, really.

A. *Taking this verse and making it a mantra to get what you want.* "...**believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.**" Just name that thing and claim that thing. Just put it out there. It's positive vibes. Speak it into existence. There's a quote from a popular preacher. I won't name him, and I'll try not to sound like him when I read the quote, because I was laughing at myself in my office when I was reading it like him.

"What are you believing for God to do in your life today? Can you see it in your mind's eye? Can you see yourself healed? Can you see yourself paying off that last debt? Can you see yourself at your ideal weight? [...] As you open your heart and allow God's thoughts to become your thoughts, and you receive His promises by faith, just like it says in the above verse—whatever you ask for in prayer will be yours!"

Do you just see how this verse, when taken to an extreme, can turn into the formula for us to get whatever we want? Some preachers will use this passage to tell people that if they had more faith, their cancer would leave. If they had more faith, they would have more money. There are a lot of people who get hurt from the extreme misuse of this verse. That's one extreme.

B. *Not praying.* Something that brings me great hope and security is just the truth of God's sovereignty, because God's Word says he is never surprised. He's always in control, he works things out with all wisdom, and he knows what's best. I can rest in that and I sleep great. It's awesome.

Yet if I'm just being honest, it also makes it hard for me to pray, because I'll just figure that God is going to do what he wants to do anyway, and so why spend the time getting all worked up over something when a sovereign God will do what he wants and do what's best? Do you struggle with this as well?

So we have two extremes. We have "God will accomplish something if I speak it into existence," and "God is sovereign, and so what's the point in praying?" My hope is that we'd be able to bring a balance to this because God is commanding us to pray with faith. It's assumed that we would pray. For us Christians, we pray to receive our salvation and we pray to God as we daily live to him. That's the call.

This is a convicting passage for me for multiple reasons, because I'll just look at big situations and I'll think... I won't say it, because I'm a pastor, but I'll think it. "Could God really do that?" Do you ever get like that? Something seems too big or just too overwhelming, so you don't go to God? The cancer is too big and it's in the fourth stage. The marriage is too broken. The people are too lost. "God, you didn't answer it the first time, and so maybe this is just too big for you."

Then there are little situations in life where I'll just think, "You know, I don't need God for this one. I think I've got it myself. Does God really care if I pray for every meal or pray for my kids every night or for my job situation?" Doesn't God have better things to do? I mean, there are people starving in different countries and stuff. Do I really need to pray for these little things?"

I'll get into funks like that and then I'll just remind myself, "Jeff, did God save you? Does God love you? Is he faithful? Is he God? Is God God? Can he handle the situations that seem too big? You can pray with faith in big things. Is he personal? Does he care about every situation in your life? You can pray with faith in little things."

I hope we would see this passage as a kick-start to our prayer life, that you and I could know that Jesus is calling us to pray with faith for God to work in his power, that his name would be glorified, that people would get saved, that people would turn from sin and come to him, that we'd have revival in our city, that people would get healed, that people would be different, that he would just wow us with huge things and continue to be faithful with things we don't acknowledge enough. People with faith pray with power.

4. *People with faith forgive with humility.* Faith and forgiveness are closely tied together because prayer is faith pointed vertically, thanking God for his grace, asking him to work, and forgiveness is faith pointed horizontally, loving other people the way God has loved us. Jesus just marries them together.

In verse 25, he says, "**And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.**" Granting forgiveness enables us to live in freedom and love in spite of the sin and damage that has happened to us, and it allows us to pray effectively with our Savior. There are two ways to look at forgiveness.

A. *Forgiveness is a readiness and a willingness to deal with the sin against us.* Let's just be honest. There are situations when people aren't asking for forgiveness. They either don't think they're wrong or they know they're wrong but they're not willing to change. They aren't saying sorry. They feel bad, but there's no adjustment.

These situations are really difficult, because you pray for the person. You ask them to change. You wait on the Lord to change their heart, but in the waiting and the pain, you're always ready to forgive. You don't let your heart get cold. You don't stop praying. You don't let bitterness take root. You believe the best, you trust in God's timing, and you are ready and willing to forgive the second they want to change. It's a readiness and willingness to deal with the sin against you.

B. *Forgiveness receives repentance compassionately and humbly.* The tears of sorrow and grief over someone's sin get replaced with tears of joy, peace, gratitude, and thankfulness. I've just been so fortunate in my life to get to experience both of these. It's so hard when there's a season of sin and they don't want to change and you're just trying to stand strong and be faithful and love and care for them and yet stand for God's Word and holiness.

It's just an amazing thing when they turn and come to you and say, "Okay, I'm done. I want to be different." I'll never forget the places where I've been. I'll never forget the rooms. I'll never forget the places I was sitting when they would come and say, "You know what? I want to live differently now. I need to ask for your forgiveness." I just look back on those moments with a lot of joy, and I get choked up a little bit, as you can see, because they're just amazing pictures of God's grace, faithfulness, and patience to us.

So, I'll just ask this morning...*Are you here looking to extend the forgiveness God has given you, or are you holding something against someone else?* If you want to be bitter, don't forgive. If you enjoy wrath and anger, be unforgiving. If you want to scream at the top of your lungs and tell the world, don't forgive. If you want to have a very ineffective prayer life and relationship with God, don't forgive, because people with faith forgive with humility.

I love the passage in Ephesians 4. We teach it to our kids and they have to say it when they're fighting with each other. Ephesians 4:32 says, "**Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.**" I love this passage because it just reminds me that I'm never called to do anything that God hasn't already done for me.

When we forgive, we just remember that we needed forgiveness from God. It was by his grace that we can be different and we don't have to live in sin. When we forgive, we show people the love of Christ and we show fruitful faith. When we forgive, we actively show that God is real, God saves, and God is faithful. Have faith in God.

Jesus calls us to a life of faith where we live in response to what God has done for us. That call and invitation is for everyone this morning, but it's for different parties. If you are here and you do not have a relationship with God, the call and invitation is for saving faith, to start a relationship with Christ. If you are here and you're a brother or sister in Christ and you have faith, the call is just to remove anything that would get in the way of a deeper, abiding, fruitful faith with him. Have faith in God. Let's pray.

Father, we just come before you very thankful because we see that you have given us the opportunity to have faith in you, and that's an amazing thing. God, we see that you desire to have a deep and abiding relationship with us, and for that, we're very thankful. Lord, would you just remove the things that get in the way of us having that type of relationship with you? I pray that for my brothers and sisters in Christ, Lord.

For the people, for my friends who are here who don't know you yet, God, I pray that today would be the day of their salvation, that today would be the day where they admit they need you, believe in your Son, confess that, and change. I pray that December 10, 2017, would be a day

that's marked as, "That's the day where I gave my heart over to Christ," for some. I pray that you'd be faithful to do that, Lord. We love you. Thank you for the chance we have to worship you. In your Son's name, amen.

We have people here up front who would love to pray with you for anything you have going on. If you've put your faith in Christ, come up. We would love to celebrate with you, give you a high five, and help you with next steps. Other than that, guys, thank you for being here. Thanks for worshiping. See you next week.