

Faith Activates the Power of God
Dr. Michael A. Cox
Original: 9-22-24

Text: Mark 11:20-26

Gospel of Mark: [Bibliography](#) or [Manuscripts and Greek Exegesis](#)

UBS 4th Edition Paragraph Topic: The Lesson from the Withered Fig Tree

Central Idea of Message: When we approach God in prayer, we can always be confident that *no situation* is beyond his power, with the exception of a prayer which would require him to *violate his holy nature* in order to grant, which he *cannot* do because *he cannot sin*.

Introduction: Episode 60. The fig tree Jesus had cursed represented the nation of Israel, in full leaf but conspicuously fruitless. This was a vivid illustration of the nation's religious condition of hypocrisy.

But then Jesus shifted to teach an object lesson on faith expressed in the enacted parable of the cursing of the fig tree. Faith in God proves to be the power behind the moving of seemingly immovable obstacles.

I. The Withered Fig Tree (vv. 20-21)

- A. The withered fig tree (v. 20)
 - 1. Jesus and the disciples were passing by the tree just a day or so after Jesus had cursed it
 - 2. The tree was withered from the roots up: rapidly and completely dried up [miraculous]
- B. Peter points out the condition of the tree (v. 21)
 - 1. Seeing the tree reminded Peter of the curse Jesus had placed on it
 - 2. Mark's narrative provides the testimony of Peter regarding the withered condition of the tree

II. The Lesson on Faith (vv. 22-26)

- A. Jesus said to Peter, "Have faith in God" (v. 22)
 - 1. Have: maintain
 - 2. Faith: confidence, belief
 - 3. In God
 - a) The object of our belief and confidence must be God

- b) Believe in the goodness of God
- c) Believe in the power of God
- 4. The faith Jesus had in the power of God by cursing a fig tree resulted in it withering immediately
 - a) Jesus is saying that he, too, had to exercise faith in God in the cursing of the fig tree
 - b) Most use poisonous sprays, chainsaws, and stump-grinders to kill trees
 - c) Jesus needed none of these!
- B. Faith can result in God's power casting mountains into the sea (v. 23)
 - 1. Jesus tells Peter that 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 shall be granted him"
 - 2. Analysis
 - a) Hyperbole: intentional exaggeration for emphasis (cf. Cooper 188)
 - b) Mountain
 - (1) Seemingly impossible obstacle to move, something strong
 - (2) Something that cannot be done by a mere human, even with technology
 - c) Command: "Be taken up and cast into the sea"
 - d) Convinced
 - (1) "Does not doubt in his heart"
 - (2) This means not to have *divided judgment*
 - (3) Not a single act of doubt but a continued faith despite the challenge
 - e) Faith: "believes that what he says is going to happen"
 - f) Result: "it shall be granted"
- C. Praying and believing (v. 24)
 - 1. "All things for which you pray and ask"
 - a) Things which are not selfish
 - b) Things prayed according to the will of God
 - 2. "Believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you"
 - a) Faith should be the constant attitude of mind for the Christian, especially when it comes to prayer
 - b) **"Jesus made this promise on the recognized premise that petitions must be in harmony with God's will" (cf. 14:36; Matt. 6:9-10;**

John 14:13-14; 15:7; 16:23-24; 1 John 5:14-15; Grassmick 2:159)

- c) **We must pray according to the will of God and never selfishly!**
- D. Praying and forgiving (v. 25)
- 1. When we stand praying, we must forgive if we have anything against anyone
 - a) Repeated from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:12)
 - b) Standing was the usual posture of the day
 - c) Kneeling is also appropriate (Luke 22:41)
 - 2. Being forgiven by God obligates Christians to forgive those who have trespassed against us
 - a) False steps
 - b) Transgressions
 - c) Offenses
 - 3. Forgiving others who have trespassed against us apparently triggers God to forgive us when we have trespassed against him
 - a) **"Evidently God's willingness to forgive is limited by our willingness to forgive others" (Robertson 1:362)**
 - b) **A Christian cannot pray effectively when operating with an unforgiving attitude, which results in broken fellowship with God**
 - c) **Praying according to the will of God also requires not having a ruptured relationship either with God or with others!**
 - d) **"The greatest test of true faith in time of difficulty is whether the spirit of forgiveness is present" (Turlington 359)**
 - e) **Faith and a willingness to forgive are two necessary requirements for effective prayer!**
 - f) Well, this stings!
- E. God will not forgive our transgressions unless we forgive others (v. 26)
- 1. Not present in the best texts of Mark
 - 2. Is present in Matt. 6:15
 - 3. Definitely something Jesus said

Conclusion: Principles.

(1) The object of our faith must always be the biblical, triune God such that our faith is in God, not in faith itself, thus, the source of the power required to perform any miracle is God, not faith (v. 22).

(2) We do not manipulate God with prayer or with anything else; not even faith can manipulate God into doing our bidding (v. 23).

(3) Maybe our problem in prayer is that what we really want from God is *our* answer and not his (v. 23).

(4) The faith of which Jesus speaks in this passage contrasts sharply with the absence of faith evident in the nation of Israel as a whole in that day and with the absence of such genuine faith in today's world as well (v. 24).

(5) Prayer is a wonderful expression of both *faith in God* to do what is best, in his terms, and of *personal humility* in acknowledging our own inabilities which prompted our prayers (v. 24).

(6) "We can only move the mountains that God wants removed, not those that we want moved" (v. 24; Cole 968).

(7) When we approach God in prayer, we can always be confident that *no situation* is beyond his power, with the exception of a prayer which would require him to *violate his holy nature* in order to grant, which he *cannot* do because *he cannot sin* (v. 24).

(8) "It has well been said that the purpose of prayer is not to get man's will done in heaven, but to get God's will done on earth" (v. 24; Wiersbe, *Exposition*, 1:150).

(9) Refusing to forgive others apparently can bar us from being forgiven by God, so, in this sense, God is limited by the action of mankind (v. 25).

(10) Mountain-moving faith appears only to be present where there is also the abundance of forgiving love, because prayer and resentment are utterly incompatible with each other (v. 25).