

## Mark 11:20-26

### “Have faith in God”

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#### I. **Introduction**

Last week started looking at the cursing of the fig tree, the strangest miracle done by Jesus. Not only is it the *only miracle he did that has a negative outcome*, it also is the *only miracle done that didn't directly benefit others*. Another oddity is that *the explanation given by Jesus to Peter's observation of the fig tree the next day being "dried up from its roots" doesn't seem to fit the curse*. That will be the text under our examination today as we will be looking at Jesus' explanation in the context of the cursing of the fig tree. Peter was amazed at Jesus ability to destroy and Jesus answered him with the secret of making destruction unnecessary and the secret of removing the obstacles to fruitfulness. Jesus doesn't make His answer national but moral as He tells His disciples how to avoid fruitlessness and lack of spiritual progress.

#### II. **Vs. 20-21 Dried figs**

Vs. 20-21 This reverence to Peter is only in Mark's account and Mark is very specific by telling us that Peter observed this “*in the morning*”. The point is that it was *both clearly visible as well as could have happened quicker but wouldn't have been visible* when they went through he same area in the evening. Also the words “*dried up from the roots*” is in a Greek verb tense that means that it was completely withered and dead. This miracle,

albeit a negative one, had nothing to do with this ***fig tree's health it was instead a question only its productivity***. It is completely outside the normal possibility for this tree to have gone from healthy foliage to dead from its roots in 24 hours or less. One of the things about fig trees is that they are very difficult to kill, you can cut them down only leaving a stump and they will quickly send up shoots from the stump and soon you will have a weird looking fig tree on your hand. It is no wonder Peter exclaimed in surprise at the demise of this fig tree and recalled Jesus words towards it of "*Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.*"

Then we have Jesus seemingly disconnected answer to Peter's observation. There are some who have wrestled Jesus' words away from the context of the cursing of the fig tree and used then to support a "**formula for working miracles**"; as if Jesus is saying in response to Peter, "*Why Pete, you too can curse fig trees and cause them to die because you have faith in God!*" There are even those who stretch this further to suggest that like Jesus we have "*power in our words*" that what ever we say will come to pass Just like Jesus did here, so we need to go around pronouncing the things we want to happen materially and avoid negative speech. There was no secret formula given by Jesus on how to "*speak things into being*" but instead the secret Jesus was communicating was how to live a Christian life that will always be fruitful and productive. Israel's fruitlessness was a direct result of substituting, meaningless religious rituals and commercialism instead of practicing a true loving, obedient relationship with God. They had been going through the motions of performance as an outward show but in reality the priests were corrupt who were only as Jesus called them "blind guides". The life of the nation was an example of fruitfulness as Jesus had warned and now He takes the opportunity to teach these men

whom He was entrusting with being a blessing to the world so that they may avoid the same outcome.

### III. Vs. 22-24 How to avoid withered roots

Vs. 22-24 Jesus doesn't explain to Peter the lesson to be learned from the fate of the tree but instead He deals with the lesson of the importance of prayer. The test of faith is that we who pray see the fulfillment before it happens not after. Fruit wasn't found in Israel, because life had departed from the roots; and life had departed because they had replaced obedient trust in God for religious rituals and commerce. So Jesus charged these men to exhibit the expression of faith, prayer. And that prayer must be aimed at the mountains of lack of compassion, pride, lack of forgiveness etc. True prayer purifies the person that prays. Where faith is exercised fruitfulness will always be visible! Indirectly this was a word not just for Israel but for the individual believer, the church and our nation!

Jesus continues on in the context of how to avoid being fruitless by having faith in God by talking about moving mountains. There are again those that want to wrestle these verse away from the context and say that it can be done if you just have "*enough believing faith*". Yet I have never heard of these faith healers ever actually moving a mountain into the sea. I believe that what Jesus is trying to explain is that He knows that at times simply trusting in God is a mountainous obstacle. There are always going to be opposition and obstacles that stand in the way of our faith in God. Israel at the time of Jesus' words faced a mountain called the occupying force of the Roman army and its enslavement of the nation. There is the normal doubts and fears of every day life but all of these drive us to a decision: **Are we going to chose to use the mountains to interpret who God is, or are we going to chose to interpret the mountain by who we know God to**

**be?** The secret of “*mountain removal*” in our lives is to always start with what you know is true about God. **Truths like:** *He is all knowing, He is perfect in all His ways, He loves me enough to send His Son to save me while I was still a practicing sinner. He is every where present and nothing escapes His loving eyes or hands. He will never leave me or forsake me.* As we go through the list of truths that we know to be true about our God, that we have experienced in our relationship with Him time after time, something happens in our hearts as we realize that what ever mountain is in front of us isn’t as big as we thought it was as we have faced mountain’s like this before and nothing we have ever faced was able to separate us from the love of God!

#### IV. Vs. 25-26 Our greatest obstacle

Vs. 25-26 There is one mountain in particular that is the most difficult to overcome in our journey of faith. Our greatest Himalayan obstacle is one of our own making it’s the “*mountain of our own pride.*” Our pride is what keeps us from trusting in God as we won’t pray for those who have offended us, our thinking that we deserve better and are in fact better than someone else. I know of nothing I wrestle against more in my life than my pride manifested in nothing forgiving those who have offended me at some time. What is even more damming in my case is that I want and expect that others should not have pride towards me and forgive me when I’ve wronged them. The mountain of forgiveness and pride must be removed in our lives if we are going to regularly experience fruitfulness and spiritual health. The basis of this forgiveness as Jesus tells us in verse 26 is the realization of the fact that Jesus do easily and readily forgave us our sins. He assumed our debt and paid the price; He didn’t wait until we came groveling up to Him begging, no why we were still practicing our rebellion He laid down His life on

our behalf. There is not a one of us that deserved such forgiveness so how come we want to apply a new spread sheet for those that have offend us? **This passage has three rules**

**for prayer as well as four truths about our faith:**

1. **Vs. 22-23 Prayer to be effective must be according to faith:** The phrase about moving mountains was a common Jewish phrase, as it was widely used for removing difficulties. Good Rabbi's were said to be able by their teaching to remove the difficulties in the minds of the students and were called "mountain-removers". The prayer of faith requires two things from the person who offers it:
  - a. **That we are willing to take that which hinders us to God:** There are times when what we are asking of God is not something that He would have for us. So we either don't ask Him for what we know He won't give us or we ask Him for it and become disillusioned when He doesn't grant us for us that which would only ruin us.
  - b. **That we are willing to apply God's answer to our lives once He has given it:** It is common for folks to ask God for things that they have no intention to take. It is useless to ask God for guidance unless we are willing to be humble and obedient enough to apply it.
2. **Vs. 24 Prayer must be expectant:** Prayer must never be a formality, a ritual with out hope! Like anything we must have an attitude of expectant confident hope increases the likelihood of success. Prayer must always be expectant; far to often what we want from God is OUR ANSWER and when God's comes first, as it always does, we don't recognize it.
3. **Vs. 25-26 Prayer must be directed to personal transformation:** If we are going to accomplish God's purposes in our life than we need to aim our prayer at the areas we need to be changed in. If what separates us from our fellow man isn't dissolved we will never have any answers to prayers, so we ought to start there first.

Jesus goes on to tell His disciples four truth to avoid becoming dried up:

1. **Vs. 22 Object of your faith:** Jesus didn't tell them to just have faith or to have faith in faith as the key is the object of your trust not your trust.
2. **Vs. 23 Outworking of your faith:** Jesus didn't say, study the problem, or even pray about the problem. No, Jesus said "Who ever SAYS to this mountain" This requires action not theory. The object of our faith must come into contact with the obstacle to our faith and that will require the working out our faith. Prayer doesn't change THINGS, prayer changes me while the object of my faith; God, changes things.
3. **Vs. 24 Obtaining faith:** Next Jesus tells us what do if we lack the faith to remove the obstacles to our faith, ask the Father to grant us the faith. You may recall the request of the father when Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration

and confronted the scene of the demon possessed young man and the unbelief of the father, where he said to Jesus, “*Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.*” **Jesus didn't teach that obtaining faith was the way to GET things you wanted, He taught that obtaining faith was the way of REMOVING the the things that kept you from enjoying the relationship with the Lord already had for you!** The faith healers have it all wrong, we need to be asking the lord to remove the mountains of the flesh, the obstacle's that keep us fruitless instead of fruitful!

4. **Vs. 25-26 Obstacle to faith:** The last thing Jesus does as He gives us the path to fruitfulness in our lives is mention our greatest foe, PRIDE and nothing reveals this clearer that our lack of forgiveness towards those who have offended us. Faith is always short-circuited because of our pride.