

THE POWER OF PRAYER (Mk. 11:22-26)

Mk. 11:22 And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. ²³ For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. ²⁴ Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. ²⁵ And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. ²⁶ But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive you your trespasses.

In BBC 1's *Songs of Praise* last Sunday, Sally Magnusson was on the Island of Lewis, highlighting President Trump's links to the island through his mother. One of the American ministers who was interviewed spoke about Trump's early years in New York and how he was greatly influenced by his friend Pastor Norman Vincent Peale, the author of *The Power of Positive Thinking*. This extremely successful book proposes the method of 'positive thinking' which, - in certain Christian circles, - lies at the heart of the so-called 'prosperity gospel', also known as the 'health and wealth gospel'.

Is that what Jesus is teaching here in Mk. 11:22-26? Was He saying that if you have the power to believe, there is nothing you cannot achieve? ... You can use prayer to accomplish anything you desire ... Was He saying that, or what was He saying? ... What was Jesus teaching about the power of prayer?

In the previous verses, - through the analogy of the fig tree, - He has been illustrating the extremely poor spiritual state of the temple 'worship', and of the nation as a whole.

Much of what Jesus says here, He has already said before ... but why was He speaking about prayer in such a setting as this? ... This was Passover time, and this was when the Jewish people were *extra*, 'over the top', and fanatically religious. This was the time of the year when so many of them had travelled long distances to be in Jerusalem, and in the temple. This was the time of the year when their religious practice was reinvigorated. They would *literally* have been praying morning, noon, and evening ... But, what value did their prayers actually have? ... Were they praying to be heard and seen of men? Or, for God? ... Surely it is fairly obvious what the answer is.

What about the disciples? From their perspective, ... how often, - *before* Calvary, - do we find them praying? ... I couldn't find any examples. Yes, they often were present when Jesus prayed, but I don't think we read of a single incident, - *before* Calvary, - when *they* prayed ... *After* Calvary, they were praying in the upper room, but *before* Calvary, - when they were asked to

pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, - they fell asleep! ... There is no record in the Gospels of prayer being a major activity in their daily agenda!

But then, they would not have seen the need to practise prayer because anything they wanted they literally turned to Jesus, the Son of God ... Prayer is talking to God ... and they talked to His Son, - face-to-face, - every day!

However, in a few days' time, they would no longer have that ready access to Jesus, so they *had* to learn *very quickly* how to pray! ... Previously, they had asked Him, **Lk. 11:1** **Lord, teach us to pray** ... but it's obvious they had not done anything significant about it because they continued to have Jesus with them.

How important is prayer? It is more than a 'lifeline' you cast 'every now and again', especially when you are facing hopeless and desperate times ... But is that *real* prayer. ... Surely *real* prayer is more than a few hurried words, when your mind is on something else. ... And yet every child of God knows the power of prayer for it was through prayer that you confessed your sins and invited Jesus Christ into your heart to become your Saviour and Lord. ... Every true believer has already discovered prayer to be life-changing! ... It brings us straight through to the throne-room of God!

... And here, the disciples could see Jesus to ask Him for their needs, but very shortly, He would be leaving them, so they had to learn.

It is Wednesday morning ... the following day, - Thursday, in the evening, - the disciples would sit with the Saviour for their final Passover meal. Then, they all would do down into the valley of Kidron, across the brook, and into the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus would be arrested and taken away. The next day, - Friday, - He would be crucified. ... Friday was just two days away ... the time was short, and these disciples had to learn how to pray.

On the Wednesday morning, - as they walked towards the temple, - He put a curse on the fig tree, and when they were returning later, **Mk. 11:21** **Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. At this point,** **22** **Jesus answering saith unto them [i.e., not just Peter], Have faith in God. 23** **For verily I say unto you [personal pronoun dative plural], That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. 24** **Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall**

have them. ²⁵ And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. ²⁶ But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses. [*By the way, v.26 is absent in some Bible versions*]

Hold on a moment ... How did we get from Jesus and the fig tree to the subject of having faith in God and prayer? (By the way, this is the only *negative* miracle recorded.) Matthew explains more clearly in his parallel account, **Mt. 21:18** Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. ¹⁹ And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away. ²⁰ And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away! ... *How did that happen?!!* They are startled, even though Jesus had already spoken about prayer ... Obviously, they had not taken in what He had said to them ... ²¹ Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. ²² And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive. ... And that is why Jesus responded, **Mk. 11:22** Have faith in God. ... And then He taught them what they must do when He would no longer be with them physically.

Has He the power to answer prayer? Of course He has for He had proved it, and they had seen it. ... They had personally witnessed the power of God withering up that fig tree. ... They had literally experienced the power of God to answer prayer! ... You need not be afraid to believe He is able. You know He can and He will do that which is for His glory. God answers prayer because you and I have experienced the proof. ... I know I can trust God for I know He hears me and I know He is able to answer prayer, for I have experienced it! ... That is, - if you like, - the historical perspective and the personal reality.

... And that was the experience of the nation of Israel ... That is why the Lord so often said to His people, **Ex. 13:3** Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place ... **Dt. 8:2** And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness ... **Josh. 1:13** Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, The LORD your God hath given you rest, and hath given you this land. ... **I Chron. 16:12** Remember his marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth ...

Remember what the Lord has done for you in the past, and *know* He can do it again, today and in the future! Never doubt Him, and your faith will grow stronger! ... **Ps. 42:4** *When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday.*

Notice also where Jesus stressed the emphasis ... Yes, they had to have faith, but not simply any faith but *faith in God*. So, this is not about faith *per se*, or about how you can apply faith ... this is about *Who* you place your faith in. ... It is not about how you can make something happen through the ‘power of positive thinking’, - or any other New Age mode or method. No, - as the hymn writer says, - “Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire” ... and he goes on to explain the work of God in our prayers, “No prayer is made by man alone, The Holy Spirit pleads, And Jesus on the eternal throne, For sinners intercedes”. ... For prayer to achieve its purposes we must have the faith to believe in the God Who answers prayer. ... Prayer works because God works!

Do you trust God to answer your prayer? Well, if you say “yes”, then, *believe* it, and don’t allow anything to get in the way of your God-given faith! ... There is no point in praying if you don’t believe God is able and willing to answer ... And it is not your faith on its own that achieves the results, but it is God’s power! ... You are not able to bring about what you have asked for ... but you know *He* is. That is what you call having faith in Him, and not doubting! It is all to do with the character of God, and believing in His sovereignty and His authority. ... Paul wrote, **II Tim. 1:12** *I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded ...* **Phil. 4:19** *my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus ...* And even when Paul was in prison he continued to believe in the power of prayer, **Eph. 6:16** *Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. ...* **18** *Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit. ...* It is the Lord we keep on trusting in ... **Is. 43:2** *When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. ³ For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.*

There are no coincidences with Him. There is nothing can take Him unawares. There is nothing to halt His power, and there is nothing outside of His will ... and that is how Paul was so convinced he was able to say, **Rom. 8:28** *we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

And look at how personally Jesus speaks to His disciples, **Mk. 11:23** **For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and *shall not doubt in his heart*, but shall *believe* that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. ...** God can move mountains, and the reason He can move mountains is because He knows and has total confidence in what He can do ... and when *we* are convinced, there are no obstacles to what He can do in us and through us!

What is the point in praying for something if your heart is not completely in what you are praying for? ... And also, what is the point in praying if you are not convinced God can do what you are asking Him to do? ... It is not faith that brings the answer to our prayers ... but it is the God in Whom we *place* that faith and believe can answer our prayers.

Can you believe? ... Is it really possible to genuinely believe so that God will answer your prayers? Well, you *must* have been able to really believe at one time for it was through faith you believed in Jesus to save you from your sins ... and that was a mighty prayer for it had eternal consequences! ... You *must* have really believed at one time to have invited Him to become your Saviour so, therefore, that is the same faith in God we need to continue to exercise .. and it will not fail us because it is the God-given faith, - the faith He gifts to His people to keep on believing! ... **Mk. 11:24** **Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. ...** **23** **For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea ...** Some people make an issue of this ... “What mountain?” ... It doesn’t matter what mountain, but what does matter is the response to the question, do you believe God answers prayer, and do you believe He answers *your* prayers?

No doubt, you get some silly people who might pray and hope to move a literal mountain, - and get caught him with such silly things ... If God wanted to move a mountain He could do it, no bother, - **Ps. 46:2** **Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea ...** If He had a purpose for doing it, He could turn this world on its head ... but that is not what Jesus was speaking about here for He was simply using a hyperbole ... a figure of speech.

If you come praying to the Lord, and you doubt His power ... what is the point in praying! Why pray, if you don't believe? ... Praying requires the faith to believe God answers!

Nowadays, and throughout history, there have been people described as 'faith healers'. ... That is not what this about. You don't put your faith in a man or a woman, you put your faith in God. You don't need to find someone who makes great claims, you simply need to find the Lord ... Don't put your trust in people ... put your trust in the Lord.

Prayer is not a 'quick-fix', and it is nothing reliant on man ... but prayer is believing in the power of God, that He **Eph. 3:20** is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. ... Ah, but I don't have the great faith I long to have ... That is good you are putting no confidence in yourself, but, - in another way, - it is also a hindrance because the reason Peter began to sink when he got out of the boat and started to walk towards Jesus ... it was not because he didn't have faith ... for he did, - he had a 'little faith'. But the reason he began to sink was that he doubted, even with the very little faith he *did* have. ... Little faith is better than no faith ... and if only he had used the 'little faith' it would have been sufficient for him to believe in his *great* Saviour! ... "Little is much when God is in it"!

Besides, who of us could claim to have perfect or great faith? Because of what we are, our faith is always mixed with some degree of doubt ... but that is why we can so clearly understand the words of the man who brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus, **Mk. 9:23** Jesus said unto him, *If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.* **24** *And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.* ... Great faith is what we all aspire to, but our Heavenly Father knows what we are like ... and, in grace, He is willing to meet us at the point of our little faith ... even if it is only the size of a grain of mustard seed.

We can often tell ourselves, "I'm not important enough for God to answer my prayers". ... "Why would God want to listen to me?!" ... In response, God wants to listen to you because you are His beloved child ... Consider how Jesus loved you that He died for you on the cross of Calvary? ... Was He not sent by His Father because you have been loved since eternity ... You think you are not important enough? Think again!! ... You don't think God would answer your prayers ... but didn't He answer them when you became a

Christian? ... You would tell me you asked Jesus Christ into your life ... And did He come in ... did He answer your prayer? ... Yes, He did? ... And how did He come into your life? ... Because you prayed, and you asked Him, and you believed in His promises, set out in His Word, and established in eternity!

When you became a Christian, remember when you began to speak to Him, and He listened ... and He spoke with you, and you listened. God heard your prayer *then*, and He continues to hear your prayer *today*. ... He is the same God for He has not changed, and He loves you ... Listen to this ... **Mk. 11:24** *Therefore I say unto you ... It cannot get any more personal than that! And neither can it be any more powerful and promising, ²⁴ Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. ... You have God's word on it! ... "Standing on the promises of God".*

He understands all about you. There is nothing comes your way He does not know about. He is there with you, and He will neither leave you nor forsake you. The waters may threaten to come over your head, but you are "safe in the arms of Jesus" ... "Oh yes, He cares, I know He cares ... I know my Saviour cares". ... I believe it for it is what His Word assures me!

He hears my prayers, even when I am of 'little faith' for He knows my heart, and He knows I love Him. It doesn't mean we get everything we ask for because sometimes what we ask for is not for our good in the long-term ... but He teaches us to seek after His will, "Thy will be done" ... for His will is always best.

Finally, Jesus made one last point concerning our relationship with others, **Mk. 11:25** *And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. ²⁶ But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses. ... As a Christian, you are not an 'island' out on your own. You belong to the family for whom the Lord Jesus Christ gave His life ... Consider the implications for the disciples who would soon be departed from Jesus ... They would need each other more than ever, and so they would have to work with each other and pray for each other.*

It follows that when you come before God, expecting Him to receive you, you should be in a right relationship with your brother and sister in the Lord. ... If you are holding something against them ... it is a hindrance that needs to be sorted out! ... That is what He had taught them earlier in their discipleship, Mt. 6:⁹ After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. ¹⁰ Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

There is no point praying for the Lord's blessing if we cannot come together before Him. If there is sin stubbornly being allowed to cling on to us, - it *has* to be cleansed, and the only place of cleansing is through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ (I Jn. 1:7). Yes, we have been cleansed for all eternity when He saved us ... but we require the daily cleansing to deal with the world's dirt which so easily attaches itself to us.

When we approach the throne of grace in prayer ... in the way Jesus describes for us here ... His Heavenly Father promises to receive us, and to listen to our requests. He loves to hear His people pray, for He invites us with the promise, Mt. 11:²⁸ Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

That, then, is the essence of the power of prayer ... Prayer can do anything God can do! As John Newton wrote,

Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring;
For His grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much.

May the Lord be pleased to bless our study of His most precious Word today!
Amen.