Have Faith in God

Mark 11:20-25

Key Verse: 11:22 “Have faith in God”. Jesus answered.

Last week we learned that Jesus entered into Jerusalem riding on a donkey and that people welcomed him and shouted “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” We call his entry the ‘triumphal entry’ because Jesus came to Jerusalem to destroy sin and death through his death and resurrection. From a human point of view his entry may be considered as one of comic happenings, but from God’s point of view it was a historical moment which changed human history from death to life. In today’s passage Jesus encourages his disciples to have faith in God. His teaching is so powerful that anyone who understands and practices it can experience one miracle of God after another.

First, a poor fig tree (20-21) In the morning as Jesus and his disciple went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. The fig tree was the one which Jesus had cursed in verse 14. Jesus cursed the tree because it didn’t have any fruit. Some may complain that Jesus cursed the innocent fig tree which was not in season for fruit. But there is a hidden message behind this story. Through the fruitless fig tree Jesus saw the corrupted religious leaders in the temple. As Jesus cursed the tree, he cleared the temple. A tree generally takes time to wither from the roots. Recently I cut some branches by my driveway. It took a few days for them to completely dry. But the fig tree withered overnight from the root. Without supernatural power or intervention from outside it was impossible. Yes, the tree withered by Jesus’ power.

Like Peter in this passage, we become often surprised by the visible phenomena of things of the world. Recently I am helping one old couple whose relationship has become almost broken. When I think about the problem in this family, I remembered this fruitless fig tree. There are fundamental problems between the two behind the broken relationship. I came to realize that we need deep understanding about sinful humanity before we judge others. I mean that there are other essential hidden issues behind the superficial and visible problems in human relationships. Peter was surprised with Jesus’ curse on the withered fig tree. But Peter didn’t see the corruption of the religious leaders in the temple behind Jesus’ curse on the fruitless fig tree.

Second, have faith in God. (22-23) What was Jesus’ response to Peter’s words? Look at verse 22. “***Have faith in God,” Jesus answered.***” Have Faith in God! His answer sounds not appropriate for Peter’s words, but these words are one of the most important and powerful messages of Jesus in the Bible. We interpret these words in many ways. They have deeper meanings than simply believing in God. Long ago when my wife was passing by the church in Chicago, Dr. Samuel Lee shouted at her, “Have faith in God.” Later she confessed that it was like a thunder which woke her up from her spiritual slump. The title of the UBF MSU International Bible Conference in 1999 was ‘Have Faith in God’. This title left many positive impacts for those who attended the conference, especially for those who were carrying out world missions.

What does ‘*Have faith in God*’ mean? First, believe that our God is a loving father. Our God is a self-existent personal God. He is not an impersonal concept or supreme reason which philosophers claim. He is not a superhero in Greek mythology, either. He is a loving Father in heaven. He is living and active in his work. He loves, feels, and works like one of us. He knows each of us more than anyone else does. He understands your situation more than anyone else does because he created you and made you fearfully and wonderfully (Ps 139:13-4) God is our loving father in heaven. This is the most basic faith in God. Second, believe that he is almighty. We often confine God in the range of our reason and experience. We believe in God as much as we understand. But our God is almighty who works beyond our reason and experience. Jesus challenged this by saying in verse 23. “***Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, “Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their hearts but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him***.” It is impossible for men to move a mountain into the sea. We can use bulldozers and fork cranes to do so, but Jesus didn’t mean this. What is impossible with men, is possible with God. To the one who created the whole world, moving a mountain into the sea is like eating a piece of cake. We must believe that all things are possible with God. All things mean all things. Third, have faith in God means that believe that in all things God works for good for those who love him. (Ro 8:28) Our God is love. He poured out his love for us that he sent his One and Only Son Jesus to die for our sins on the cross. Romans 5:8 says that God demonstrated his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. What can the one who didn’t spare his own son spare for himself? (Ro 8:32) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (Ro 8: 35). This loving God is faithful. He keeps his promise. He cannot lie. He does not cancel or revoke his promise. So, Paul said that God’s gift and his call are irrevocable. (Ro 11:29) This loving and faithful God works for good for those who love him. In all things God works for good and beautiful for us in his time. We must believe this. Remember Joseph’s story! Joseph suffered from his brothers, but God used their mistakes to save many lives in the end. (Ge 50:20)

In Bible history God has always challenged his chosen people to live by faith and to experience the power of faith. God called Abraham and commanded him to leave his father’s household and go to the land where God showed him. God’s command was a big challenge to Abraham who obeyed and went without knowing where he was going. God also promised him with many children and lands even though Abraham didn’t have any children until he was 99 years old. God challenged Moses and Israelites to cross the Red Sea. How could they cross the Red Sea on foot? It was like moving a mountain with their bare hands. But, when they obeyed and touched their foot by the sea, the sea was opened. Conquering Jericho, crossing the Jordan River, and settling on the Promised Land required one act of faith after another. They all experienced mountain-moving power. They didn’t do much, but God did it all. God gave children to Abraham, God opened the Red Sea, God destroyed the wall of Jericho, God stopped the flow of the Jordan River, and God cast out the Canaanites for his people. We cannot move a mountain. But when we pray, God moves the mountain for us. Amen!

Third, pray by faith (24-25) When we live by faith, two things always disturb our faith: doubt and pride. They are two mountains to be moved from our hearts. Doubt undermines the foundation of our faith. It destroyed Adam and Eve’s family. It destroys our relationship with God, too. When we pray, we must believe that what we say will happen. When we pray, we must believe that we have already received what we prayed. But doubt denies all these. Those who doubt cannot get anything. James 1:6 says, “*But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.*” How is the wave of the sea moved? It is blown by the wind. Faith is an anchor for our soul. We have to put our faith into the deep water so that our prayer may not be shaken. Look at verse 24. “***Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours***.”

The other enemy is pride. Look at verse 25. “***And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven forgive you your sins.***” People say that forgiveness is the most difficult thing to practice. Why is forgiveness difficult to practice? This is because of our pride. Our pride does not allow us to forgive our brothers and sisters. Pride is an enemy against our faith because pride blocks our channel to God. It blocks not only our channel to God, but also God’s ears and God’s eyes. We hate others because we don’t forgive. We still believe that we are right and they are wrong even though God is the only one who judges right. What we have to do is repent of our pride and forgive others. Then, all things may go well with our soul. As long as we bind others on this earth, we are not free from our own bandage. Jesus said in Matthew 18:18, “*Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*”

Why do we pray? We pray because we believe that God will answer our prayer. Each one and each family has his or her own mountain. Moving the mountains looks like mission impossible. But we pray because we believe that our God moves the mountains. “*Have faith in God!*” With this promise Missionary Peter Kim went to Ukraine as a missionary even though he couldn’t speak Ukraine at all. By faith he studied the language and preached the gospel and raised many Ukraine disciples of Jesus for the last 30 years until he withdrew to Korea this year. “*Have faith in God”* withthis promise my family got the twin children after we got married 9 years. God challenged me and my wife with these words so that we might believe the power of God. “*Have Faith in God*” with this word, Dr. Ben Toh got US citizenship even though he had received deportation letters from INS. As Hebrews says, by faith others conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword... and so on. (Heb 11:33-34) I don’t have time to introduce all of them, but say a word, “Have Faith in God!” Amen!