HAVE FAITH IN GOD

Mark 11:20-25

Key Verse: 11:22

“’Have faith in God,’ Jesus answered.”

In the Bible, two of the great commands given by our Lord Jesus Christ are to love one another (Jn 13:34-35), and to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:18-20). These two commands are closely connected and are to be obeyed, both on an individual basis, and as a community. In truth, without loving one another, we cannot make disciples of all nations. Making disciples of all nations is too colossal to carry out. So we need to work together with one mind and heart. For this reason, last year’s New Year’s message was, “With one mind, glorify God,” based on Romans 15:1-13. To truly be one, we need Christ’s mindset. We need to grow to maturity. In what respects do we need to grow? We need to grow in faith, in love and in hope (1Co 13:13; Col 1:4-5). May we grow in faith in 2024.

The words “Have faith in God” are very familiar to us. We may think we already have faith in God. But as we face challenging situations we often feel powerless. We know in our minds that God can do all things, but in practice we resign ourselves to the status quo. We do not live by faith. Faith in God gives us power, power to overcome hardships and carry out our mission successfully. Most people like to talk, and talking is important. But more importantly we need power. It is because the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power (1Co 4:21). This power is not physical, but spiritual. In this passage Jesus teaches us the power of faith–especially the power to move mountains, and the power of prayer and forgiveness.

First, the power of mountain-moving faith (20-23). Jesus’ disciples, in a few days, had experienced many surprises. Jesus entered Jerusalem as a king, riding on a donkey’s colt. People welcomed him, shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” (9). The next day, on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus cursed a fig tree which had many leaves but no fruit; it symbolized the Jerusalem Temple. Then Jesus cleansed the temple and rebuked the religious leaders for misusing God’s house for their own benefit. They began looking for a way to kill Jesus. Seeing all these things, the disciples were confused and fearful. As they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots (20). Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!” (21) He was really amazed by the power of Jesus’ words. Even though Peter had a big mouth, his words did not have any power. He wished his words had power.

How did Jesus respond? Let’s read verses 22-23. “’Have faith in God,’ Jesus answered. ‘Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, “Go, throw yourself into the sea,” and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them.’” Jesus’ answer reveals that he understood Peter’s desire. Jesus did not rebuke him for wanting spiritual power. Rather, Jesus taught him how to have it. Jesus did not mention a method, skill or technique. Rather, Jesus directed him to the source of power. It is God Almighty. The expression “God Almighty” appears repeatedly in the Bible. Among the many attributes of God, almighty power is such a part of his identity that it is included in his name: “God Almighty.” The Bible tells us how God has revealed his power in many ways.

God revealed his power in the creation. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1). God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light (Gen 1:3). Light is more than the rays of the sun by which we perceive the world. Light includes many elements we do not see with our eyes, such as radio waves, microwaves, and gamma rays. Light contains tremendous energy beyond our comprehension. Moreover, God created the land and the seas, all kinds of vegetables, flowers and trees, and animals of various kinds. For example, there are more than 11,000 species of birds. Each species is individually colored, has unique characteristics and capabilities, and makes distinct sounds. In the morning, we can hear them singing praises to God in a chorus. Then, there is the vast universe. The earth we live on seems huge–especially when we try to travel around it. But it is quite small compared to the sun. And the sun is just one of 100 billion stars in the Milky Way galaxy. What is more, there are over 200 billion galaxies–perhaps as many as two trillion. These are all the expressions of God’s creation power. As we consider this, we cannot but say, “How Great Thou Art!”

God’s almighty power is also revealed through his redemption. At Mt. Sinai, God introduced himself to Israel by saying, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Ex 20:2). We find these words repeated throughout the Old Testament. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt, oppressed by a cruel Pharaoh. But God delivered them by his mighty power through the sacrifice of paschal lambs. In the same way, all people were slaves of sin and death under the power of Satan. No one could set themselves free. But God exerted his mighty power through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Christ’s death paid the price for our sins once and for all (Heb 10:10). When Jesus said, “It is finished,” sin’s power was broken forever. God’s mighty power is revealed especially through Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. It is also revealed in other ways–through healing the sick, ruling over the nations, and judging and destroying evil. It is by this power that he will create new heavens and a new earth. Considering God’s power, it is infinite and endless. With this power, anything and everything is possible. The question is, how can we access this power?

Jesus said, “Have faith in God.” We can access God’s power by faith. Faith comes through hearing the word of God. When even one word of God comes into our hearts, we become aware of the Almighty God and his Son Jesus Christ and his kingdom. We come to know his great love and enjoy his presence and blessing. When Jesus said, “Have faith in God,” he was giving Peter and his disciples access to God. Having faith is like having a wifi password. There are vast resources of the Internet available all around us. However, to access it we need the wifi password. In the same way, the power of God is always available. Anyone can access this power through Jesus. Jesus is the way to the Father God (Jn 14:6). God receives anyone who comes to him in Jesus’ name. As we face hardships, let’s come to God through Christ.

With faith in God we can experience his mountain moving power. Mountains symbolize the immovable. To each of us they represent something we cannot overcome by ourselves. They may be mountains of sickness, bereavement, poverty, estrangement, stagnation, and more. Are you confronting any of these or other mountains? It is time to have faith in God. On an international scale, we face global conflicts, political instability, economic uncertainty, a degenerating moral and ethical milieu, climate change and natural disasters, future pandemics, and more. So many people look at these mountains, are overwhelmed by despair, and live in resignation and self-indulgence. Yet, to those who have faith in God, it is time to move the mountains into the sea. Let’s have faith in God!

To carry out the International Summer Bible Conference 2023 was like moving huge mountains. In many hearts were mountains of spiritual malaise after enduring the Covid pandemic and lockdowns. Practically, we faced mountains of travel restrictions, visa problems, and financial need. How could we dare to have a large international conference in that situation? Some of the conference planners suggested that at best 1,000 North Americans would attend with no international delegates. However, the Lord had given me his word from 1 John 1:5b, “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.” I was convinced that the Lord wanted to drive out all darkness and bring spiritual revival. And God raised many coworkers around me who shared the same mindset. We were so encouraged by Korean leaders who prayed wholeheartedly for the ISBC. By faith in God, I gave the prayer topic for a total of 2,000 attendants–1,500 from North America and 500 international delegates. We prayed and prepared with all our hearts, with leaders from North America and Korea working together. We focused on raising messengers and testimony speakers. We also visited UBF ministries throughout the world to encourage participation in the conference. One by one the mountains before us were thrown into the sea. People’s hearts opened, travel restrictions were removed, financial resources were provided. Many people came. The Lord sent 2,258 total attendants–1,691 from North America and 567 international delegates, including nearly 300 from Korea. The messages and testimonies were blessed by the power of the Holy Spirit. As a result, many young people repented of their sins and accepted Christ. Many volunteered to live as missionaries. Many UBF chapters revived as their members found new strength and God blessed their fall semester ministries. God has given us great victory by his power and for his glory! Praise God!

Now we can pray for the European SBC. The mountains we confront may be those of humanism, secularism and hedonism. However, our Almighty God can throw them into the sea and bring a great spiritual revival. God can make Europe a great missionary-sending continent once again. Let’s pray for this.

Having faith in God involves overcoming doubt. Let’s read verses 22-23 one more time. “‘Have faith in God,’ Jesus answered. ‘Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, “Go, throw yourself into the sea,” and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them.’“ When we have faith in God, strangely, doubt arises in our hearts. The more we struggle not to doubt, the more doubts arise in our hearts. Where does this doubt come from? It is not psychological. Rather, it is the devil’s work. From the beginning, in the Garden of Eden, the devil tempted humankind to doubt God’s love and goodness. When doubt was planted in the woman’s heart, she was deceived and came under Satan’s control. Indeed, doubt is Satan’s powerful and deadly weapon. The devil’s doubt is based on lies about God. The world is full of such lies.

On the other hand, the Bible tells us the truth: God is love (Dt 7:9; Ps 36:7; 1 Jn 4:8). God is good (Ps 100:5; Ps 118:1; 1Pe 2:3). God is holy (Lev 11:44-45; Isa 6:3; 1Pe 1:16). God is faithful (Ex 34:6-7; Joel 2:23; 1Co 10:13). God is compassionate (2Ch 30:9; Jonah 4:2; Ro 9:15). God always works for the good of those who love him (Ro 8:28). God so loves the world that he sent his one and only Son as a sacrifice of atonement for us (Jn 3:16). We should never doubt the love or goodness of God. When we hold the truth about God in our hearts, we can be more than conquerors by his grace (Ro 8:37). This is why we must listen to the word of God prayerfully and continually, engaging in spiritual battle to overcome doubt and let the truth of God fill our minds and hearts.

As we overcome doubt by faith, we can speak to the mountain before us. We can say, “Go throw yourself into the sea” and experience the mighty power of God. UBF missionaries and leaders have been doing this through one-to-one Bible study. Recently, I visited several Asian nations: Mongolia, India, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia. Culturally, these nations are Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim. These religions are like huge mountains. However, as the word of God is spoken by faith in these nations, the power of God is at work to change lives and make a new history. For example, a little more than 30 years ago, some went to Mongolia, led by Aquila Shin, Matthew Lim and Paul Kwon. Mongolia was just emerging from a 70 year period of Communist rule, which had followed centuries of Buddhist domination. There was no Mongolian Bible. By faith our missionaries began to translate the Bible into Mongolian. Then they began to teach the words of God to young people. God’s power started moving through them. Students accepted the gospel of Christ and grew as Jesus’ disciples. House churches were established, and some became pioneers of new chapters. Now there are many second-generation believers from Mongolian house churches. Some were baptized recently; they experienced overflowing joy. Now a vision is growing that Mongolia may be a great blessing to the world by sending missionaries.

Korea has produced so many warriors of faith whom God is using to raise disciples of Jesus Christ. In the history of world mission, Korea stands out as a bright, shining star of God’s mighty and lifesaving work. And God has blessed Korea abundantly. Just last month, as our journey team walked through a park in Sri Lanka, local high school students came running up to us, shouting, “Korea, Korea, BTS.” They were interested in Koreans, not Americans. It seems that Korean culture is the most popular. K-pop, K-drama, and kimchi are the best. In this season, young Korean professionals can go almost anywhere as missionaries. God has given an open door. Let’s have faith in God to call many young people as a new generation of missionaries.

Second, the power of prayer and forgiveness (24-25). After telling his disciples to have faith in God, Jesus said, “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (24). Jesus gave us a great invitation to ask for anything in prayer. He really wants us to come to God in prayer with all of our problems and needs. As we pray in this way, the Lord also reveals himself to us. We find that the best blessing is the relationship with God himself. Prayer is our surrender to God in full trust and assurance that his will is best for us (Ro 12:2; Ja 4:3). When we pray like this, we can experience the grace, love and power of God and find real peace. We find that he always answers our prayers in the best way.

Jesus continued in verse 25: “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” Prayer is having a right relationship with God. At the same time, God wants us to have a right relationship with others. Otherwise, God will not answer our prayers. In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus said, “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.” It is God’s absolute requirement for us to forgive others.

How much should we forgive? Who should we forgive? Jesus said, “...if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them….” The words “anything” and “anyone” tell us that there is no justifiable reason not to forgive others. In the parable of the unmerciful servant, we sinners are compared to a man who owed God ten thousand bags of gold – billions of dollars – that could never be repaid. But God had mercy on us; he forgave all our sins unconditionally. In contrast, sins against us are compared to a small debt of about one day’s wages – around $200. Should we withhold forgiveness of a small debt when we have been forgiven so much? In the parable, the master called such a person a wicked servant (Mt 18:32). Do you want to be a wicked servant? No! Then let’s forgive others’ sins against us.

Practically speaking, it is not easy to forgive others. It may be impossible by our own effort. But it is always possible when we remember Jesus’ grace at the cross. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34a). As Jesus forgives us, so we also must forgive others. Recently, I saw the power of forgiveness at work in the Sri Lanka ministry. Two great missionaries, Barnabas Baek and Luke Jeon, have worked in the same mission field for many years. But in the course of helping one shepherd family, there was a misunderstanding which soured their relationship. They could not work together for a long time. But during our recent visit, the Holy Spirit worked mightily. As we fasted and prayed to overcome some hardships, the Holy Spirit moved Luke’s heart to realize he had given Barnabas a hard time. He sincerely apologized and asked for forgiveness. Barnabas forgave Luke from his heart. Their love for one another was restored and they began to plan future conferences together. God will surely bless them. Forgiving others helps us to grow in grace and enables our community to glorify God.

As we begin this new year, we may try to do great things. But the most important thing God wants from us is to have faith in him. Jesus said, “Have faith in God.” “If you hold anything against anyone, forgive them.” May this be the year of mountain-moving faith and forgiving love. In closing, I want to share Ephesians 3:20-21: “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”