

Lifelines

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Topic: Faith

Having Faith in the Faithful One

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Today I was reflecting upon the theme of faith and Jesus' simple statement found in Mark 11:22: "Have faith in God." At this time Jesus and His disciples were participating in the Jewish festivals leading up to Passover, while staying in Bethany and commuting into Jerusalem each day.

One day at the Temple, Jesus saw that areas of the Temple were turned into marketplaces, selling sacrifices and other "spiritual" items. The issue was not just about selling things there, it was about the fact that they had taken over the one place where non-Jews could worship. Jesus took the sash from the curtains, made a whip, and drove the sellers and moneychangers out of the Temple.

He spoke up saying that God had established the Temple to be a house of prayer and worship for all people, but these marketers had turned it into a den of thieves by usurping the area reserved for non-Jews to worship God. Jesus insisted that the Temple was to be a place of prayer for all people.

The next morning, Jesus and His followers were heading for Jerusalem, when Jesus saw a fig tree full of leaves, but with no fruit. Jesus cursed the tree, saying "May no one ever eat fruit from you again" (see Mark 11:14). The next morning as they were heading into Jerusalem, Peter noted that the tree Jesus had cursed the day before had shriveled from the roots upward. It would never bear fruit again.

These two events were related. The fig tree was a living parable of Judaism and the temple system. Like a fig tree, its purpose was to produce fruit. The Temple had existed for centuries, but had been turned into a place of business rather than worship. It was intended to reach all people, but catered only to insiders. When Jesus cursed the unfruitful fig tree, He was pronouncing judgment on the temple system. As they came back to Bethany, Peter was wowed by the fact that the tree had shriveled up within a day of Jesus condemning it. This was a potent illustration of how the stone temple was soon to be replaced by a living temple, comprised of believers from all nations (1 Cor. 3:16).

Jesus used Peter's comments on the withered fig tree as a teaching moment. He told them three important truths about prayer. The first is found in Mark 11:22 (NIV): "Have faith in God." God is the one who is supernatural, who can overrule the natural order, or intervene in the affairs of life. God needs to be the one whom we trust. He is the only flawless being in the universe. If you want your prayers to be answered, commit yourself to God and ask for His intervention in your life.

The second prayer principle is in 11:24 (NIV): "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." Jesus said that whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have already received it, and it will be yours. The point is, if you want to be rock solid in your faith during prayer, thank God for already hearing and answering the prayer. Does this mean you can ask for a million dollars and God will give it to you? No. There are many other qualifiers as to what to prayer is about, such as Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane: "Father if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, but if that is not Your will, then I ask for Your will to be done." Our requests should align with the character and purposes of God. Jesus is telling us how to overcome doubts that undermine faith.

The third secret to answered prayer has to do with getting rid of grudges, bitterness, and disrupted relationships, as we read in Mark 11: 25. Whenever you are praying, make sure you have forgiven people who hurt you, and seek forgiveness from people whom you have hurt. Righteousness comes from experiencing God's forgiveness, and forgiving others like God has forgiven us. It is being clean and right in our relationship with God, and in our relationship with others. This unlocks the power of God to work through us.

Do you have faith? Is your faith in yourself, a government, or God? Jesus said, have faith in God! God is righteous, God has the power to do all things, and God is trustworthy in all things. Have faith in God, and when you pray, pray confidently that God is able to do more than we dream possible.

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